

STORIES RETOLD
FOR
INDIAN STUDENTS

VII
HEREWARD THE WAKE

The object of this series of *Stories Retold* is to provide suitable alternative readers for the higher classes in Indian Secondary Schools, and incidentally to introduce Indian students to the great English authors in such a manner as to overcome discouragement and to stimulate interest.

The stories are not merely abridged, but largely re-written, and the need of explanatory notes has been obviated by the omission of such allusions, idioms, and terms as are only hindrances and stumbling-blocks to schoolboys.

The Series, of which this volume is the seventh, is intended to comprise not only those works which are already known and used in Indian education, but to bring within the reach of the High School pupil a number of standard English stories the nature and difficulty of which would otherwise have made them unsuitable.

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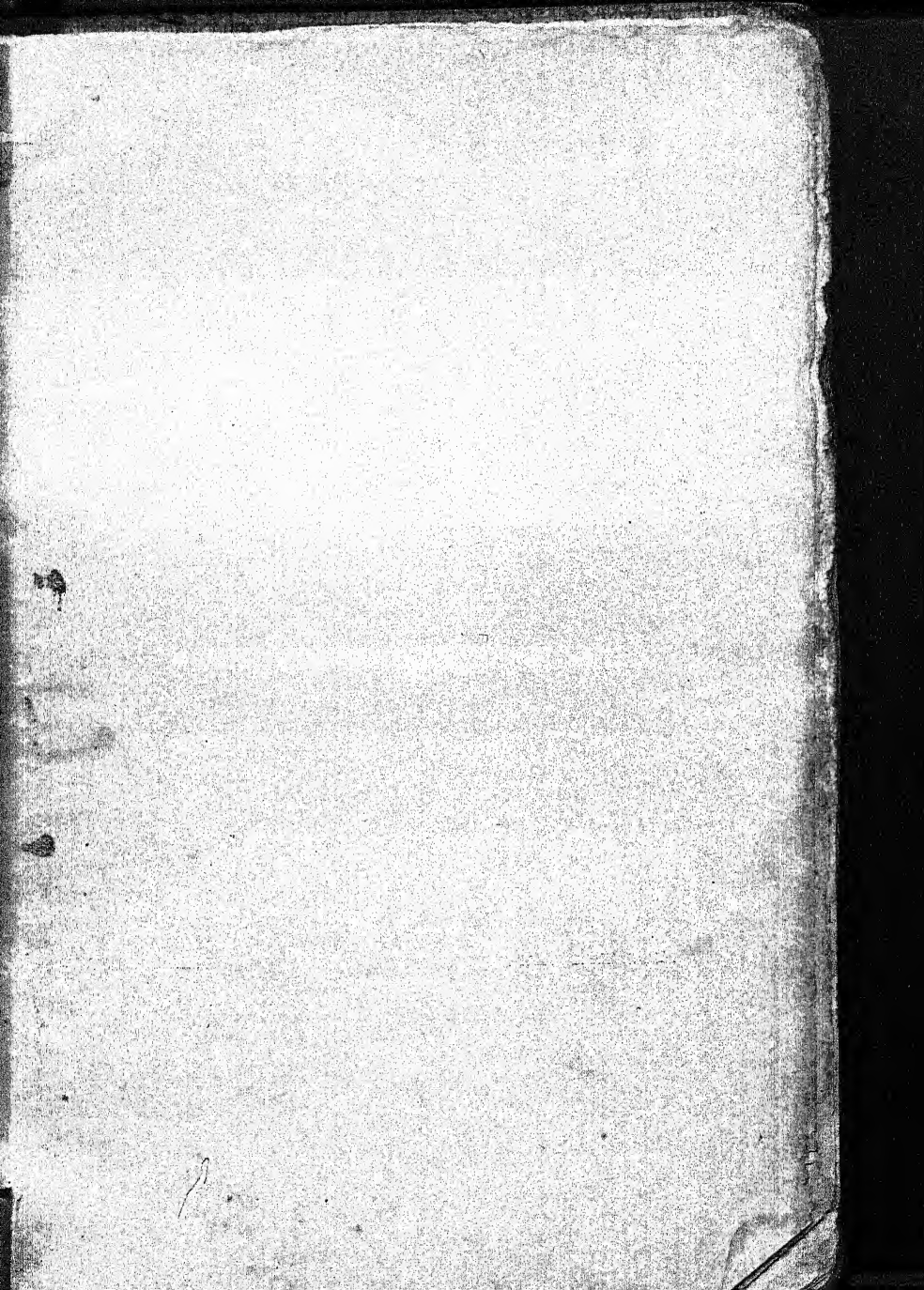
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HEREWARD'S WANDERINGS

HEREWARD THE WAKE

'LAST OF THE ENGLISH'

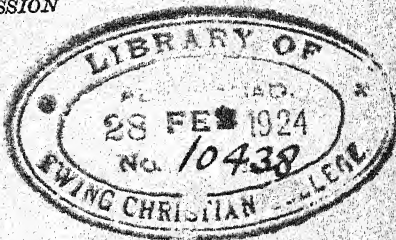
BY
CHARLES KINGSLEY

ABRIDGED AND SIMPLIFIED BY
H. MARTIN, M.A.

PRINCIPAL, ISLAMIA COLLEGE, LAHORE

WITH ELEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS AND
TWO MAPS

FOURTH IMPRESSION



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HEREWARD THE WAKE

'LAST OF THE ENGLISH'

PRELUDE

Of the Fens

THE heroic deeds of Highlanders, both in the British Isles and elsewhere, have been told in verse and prose, and not more often, nor more loudly, than they deserve. But we must remember, now and then, that there have been heroes likewise in the lowland and in the fen; and that there may be a period in the history of a lowland race when they, too, become historic for a while. There was such a period for the men of the eastern and central counties of England; for they proved it by their deeds.

When the men of Wessex, the men of the south of England, the once conquering, and, even to the last, the most civilized race of Britain, fell at the Battle of Hastings once and for all, and struck no second blow, then the men of the Danelagh, as the north-eastern district occupied by the Danes was called, disdained to yield to the Norman invader. Into the fens of what is now Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk, as into a natural fortress, the Anglo-Danish noblemen crowded down from the inland, to make their last stand against the French. Children of the old Norse Vikings, or sea-robbers, they took, in

their great need, to the sea-coast and the river mouths, as other conquered races take to the mountains; and died, like their forefathers, within scent of the salt sea from whence they came. For seven long years they held their own, not knowing, like true Englishmen, when they were beaten; and fought on desperate, till there were none left to fight. Their bones lay white on every island of the fens; their corpses rotted on the gallows beneath every Norman castle; their few survivors crawled into monasteries, with eyes picked out, hands and feet cut off; or took to the wild wood as strong outlaws. But they never bent their necks to the Norman yoke; they kept alive in their hearts that grand spirit of personal independence which they brought with them from the moors of Denmark and the dales of Norway; and they kept alive, too, these free institutions which were without a doubt the germs of British liberty. ✓

Theirs was a land worth fighting for—a good land and a large.

They have a beauty of their own, those great fens, even now, when they are dyked and drained, tilled and fenced—a beauty as of the sea, of boundless expanse and freedom. Much more had they that beauty eight hundred years ago, when they were still, for the most part, unchanged by man. The green flat stretched away to the horizon. The firmer fen-land lay, bright and green, along the foot of the low-wooded hills; beyond it the browner peat, or deep fen; and among that, long lines of reeds, emerald green in the spring, and golden under the autumn sun; shining river-reaches, and broad lakes, dotted with a million water-fowl; while the cattle wandered along their edges after the rich sedge-grass or wallowed in the mire through the hot summer day. Here and there, too, upon the far horizon, rose a tall line of ash-trees, marking some island of firm, rich soil. But that fair land, like all things on earth, had its darker aspect. The damp

mists of autumn called up fever and ague; and the winter brought its keen frosts and biting east winds.

Such was the Fenland: hard, yet cheerful; rearing a race of hard and cheerful men, who showed their power in old times in valiant fighting, and for many a century since in valiant industry, which has drained and embanked the fens until they have become a garden of fruitfulness.

Most valiant of all the fen-men, and their leader in the fatal struggle against William the Conqueror, was Hereward the Wake, Lord of Bourne, son of Leofric, Earl of Mercia, and the Lady Godiva, and the hero of this story.

It is of old times that this story tells, of the latter half of the eleventh century, and the eve of the Norman Conquest. Then Edward the Confessor was King of England in name—a good man, devoted to the Church and the monks, but unfitted by his weak and pliant character, and by his love of his Norman-French favourites, to rule over England in such critical times. The real rulers were Godwin, the great Earl of Wessex, and his son Harold, whose influence was becoming more powerful than that of the Norman party in the Court on the one hand, and that of the rival earls, Siward of Northumbria and Leofric of Mercia, on the other. William, Duke of Normandy, was biding his time, waiting for the death of the English King, to claim, and if need be conquer, England, and add it to his Norman possessions.

CHAPTER 1

How Hereward was outlawed

IN Kesteven of Lincolnshire, between the forest and the fen, lies the good market-town of Bourne, the birth-place of Hereward the Wake. A pleasant place, and a rich, is Bourne now; and a pleasant place and rich it

must have been in the old Anglo-Danish times, when the hall of Leofric, the great Earl of Mercia, was standing. To the south and west stretched, as now, the boundless flat of the fen, with the spires of Crowland Abbey gleaming bright between high trees upon the southern horizon; and to the north, from the very edge of the town fields, rose the great Bruneswald, the forest of oak and ash and elm, which still covers many miles of Lincolnshire. Mighty fowling and fishing was there in the fen below, and mighty hunting in the open forest-land above.

Now on a day—about the year 1054, twelve years before William of Normandy landed at Hastings—Lady Godiva sat in her chamber in the house of Bourne, with her youngest son, a two-years'-old boy, at her knee. She was listening with a face of horror to the complaint of Herluin, the steward of Peterborough Abbey, who had been insulted and robbed by Hereward and his band of housecarles, or men-at-arms.

To keep such a following was the pride as well as the duty of an Anglo-Danish lord; and Hereward, in imitation of his father, must needs have his following from the time he was but fifteen years old. All the unruly youths of the neighbourhood had banded themselves round a young nobleman more unruly than themselves. Their names were already a terror to all decent folk. They made up for their early sins by making those names in after years a terror to the invaders of their native land: but, as yet, their prowess was limited to drunken brawls and fights; to upsetting old women at their work, levying blackmail from quiet pedlars on the road, or bringing back in triumph, sword in hand and club on shoulder, their leader, Hereward, from some duel which his insolence had provoked.

But this time, if the story of the Steward was to be believed, they had gone to greater lengths than ever before; for they had insulted and robbed a holy priest of

the Church. Herluin had hardly finished his doleful story, when there was a pattering of heavy feet, a noise of men shouting and laughing outside, and a voice above all calling for the monk by name, which made that good man crouch behind the curtain of Lady Godiva's bed. The next moment the door of the room was thrown violently open, and in swaggered a noble lad eighteen years old. His face was of extraordinary beauty, save that the lower jaw was too long and heavy, and that his eyes wore a strange expression, from the fact that the one of them was grey and the other blue. He was short, but of immense breadth of chest and strength of limb; while his delicate hands and feet and long locks of golden hair marked him of most noble, and even, as he really was, of ancient royal race. He was dressed in a bright coloured costume, resembling on the whole that of a Scottish Highland chieftain. His wrists and throat were tattooed in blue patterns; and he carried sword and dagger, a gold ring round his neck, and gold rings on his wrists. He was a lad who might have gladdened the eyes of any mother: but there was no gladness in the Lady Godiva's eyes as she received him, nor had there been for many a year. She looked on him with sternness, almost with horror; and he, his face flushed with wine, which he had drunk as he passed through the hall to steady his nerves for the coming storm, looked at her with smiling defiance, the result of long estrangement between mother and son.

'Well, my lady,' said he, before she could speak, 'I heard that this good fellow was here; and came home as fast as I could, to see that he told you as few lies as possible.'

'He has told me,' said she, 'that you have robbed the church of God.'

'Robbed him, it may be, the old crow, against whom I have a grudge of ten years' standing.'

'Wretched, wretched boy! What wickedness next?

Know you not that he who robs the Church robs God Himself ?'

'As for the money,' said Hereward, 'I have no grudge against St. Peter ; and I will promise myself to rob some one else before long, and pay the saint back every penny.'

'The saint takes not the fruits of robbery. He would hurl them far away if they were laid upon his altar,' quoth the Steward.

'I tell you, man, if you are wise, you will hold your tongue, and let me and St. Peter settle this quarrel between us. I have a long score against you, as you know.'

'What does he mean ?' asked Godiva, shuddering.

'This !' said Hereward, fiercely enough : 'that this monk forgets that I have been a monk myself, or should have been one by now, if you, my pious mother, had had your will with me. He forgets why I left Peterborough Abbey, when Winter and I turned all the priests' books upside down, and they would have flogged us—*me*, the Earl's son—*me*, the Viking's son—*me*, the champion as I will be yet ; and how, when Winter and I got up to the top of the peat-stack, and held them all at bay there, a whole abbeyful of cowards there against two children,—it was that fox there that told them to set the peat-stack alight under us, and so bring us down ; and would have done it, too, had it not been for my uncle Brand, the only man that I care for in this wide world. Do you think I have not owed you a grudge ever since that day, monk ? And do you think I will not pay it ? See that when there is another Prior in Peterborough you do not find Hereward the Viking smoking you out some dark night, as he would smoke a wasps' nest. And I will, by——'

'Hereward, Hereward !' cried his mother, 'godless boy, what words are these ? Silence, before you burden your soul with an oath which the devils in hell will accept, and force you to keep,' and she sprang up, and seizing his arm, laid her hand upon his mouth.

'Is it not enough,' she went on sternly, 'that you should have been the bully and ruffian of the fens, but that you must add to all this a worse sin likewise, outraging God and driving me to tell your father?'

'So you will tell my father?' said Hereward, coolly.

'I must. I have loved you long and well: but there is one thing I must love better than you, and that is my conscience and my Maker.'

'And you will really tell my father?' said Hereward again. 'He is at the court of that old monkish miracle-worker, the King, at Westminster. He will tell the miracle-worker; and I shall be outlawed.'

'And if you be, wretched boy, whom have you to blame but yourself? Can you hope that the King, sainted even as he is before his death, will dare to pass over such an offence against Holy Church?'

'Blame? I shall blame no one. Pass over? I hope he will not pass over it. I only want an excuse like that for turning knight-errant, as those Norman puppies call it, like Harold Hardraade. So send off the messenger, good mother mine, and I will promise I will not have him killed on the way, as some of my house-carles would do if I but held up my hand.'

And he swaggered out of the room.

When he was gone, the Lady Godiva bowed her head into her lap, and wept long and bitterly. Neither her maidens nor the priest dared speak to her for nearly an hour; but at the end of that time she lifted up her head, and settled her face again, till it was like that of a marble saint over a church door, and called for ink and paper, and wrote her letter; and then asked for a trusty messenger who should carry it up to Westminster, where the King's court was.

'None so swift or sure,' said the house steward, 'as Martin Lightfoot.'

Lady Godiva shook her head. 'I don't trust that man,'

she said. 'He is too fond of my poor—of the Lord Hereward.'

'He is a strange one, my lady, and no one knows whence he came; but ever since my lord threatened to hang him for talking with my young master, he has never spoken to him, nor scarcely, indeed, to living soul.'

So Martin Lightfoot was sent for. He came in straight into the lady's bedchamber, after the simple fashion of those days. He was a tall, bony man, as was to be expected from his nickname; lean as a stick, with a long hooked nose, a scanty brown beard, and a high pointed head. His only garment was a shabby grey woollen tunic, and laced shoes of untanned hide. He might have been any age from twenty to forty: but his face was disfigured with deep scars and long exposure to the weather. He dropped on one knee, holding his greasy cap in his hand, and looked, not at his lady's face, but at her feet, with a stupid and frightened expression. She knew very little of him, save that her husband had picked him up upon the road as a wanderer some five years since; that he had been employed as a doer of odd jobs and runner of messages; and that he was supposed from his silence and strangeness to have something unnatural about him.

'Martin,' said the lady, 'they tell me that you are a silent and a prudent man.'

'That I am.'

"'Tongue breaketh bone,
Though she herself hath none.'"

'I shall try you: do you know your way to London?'

'Yes.'

'To your lord's lodgings?'

'Yes.'

'And will you go and deliver this letter safely?'

'Yes.'

'And safely bring back an answer?'

'Nay, not that.'

'Not that?'

Martin made a doleful face, and drew his hand across his throat, as a hint of the doom he expected.

'He, the Lord Hereward,' said Godiva, 'has promised not to let you be harmed.'

Martin gave a start, and his dull eyes flashed out a moment: but the next he answered, as curtly as was his wont:

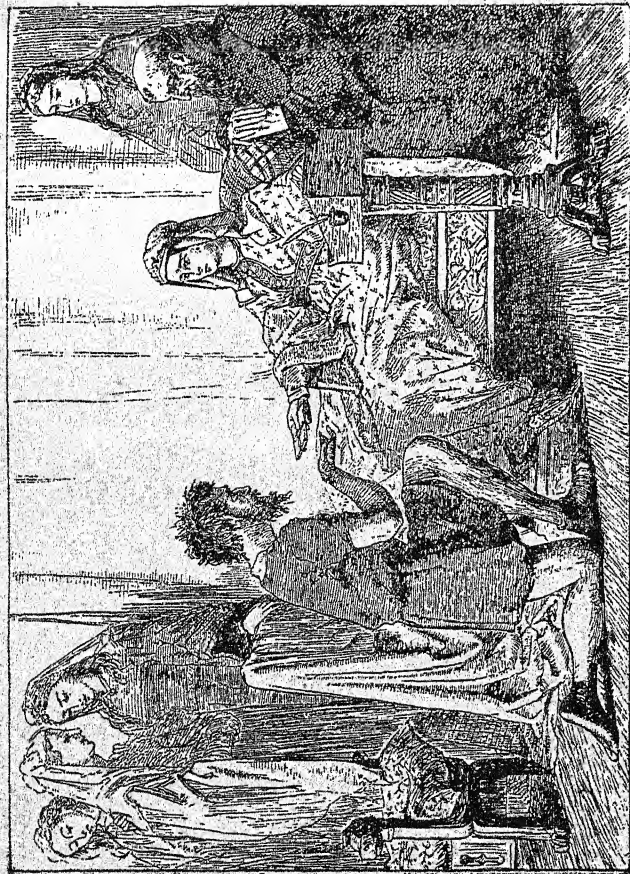
'The more fool he.'

Then he rose, and putting the letter solemnly into the purse at his girdle, ran out of the door with clenched teeth, as a man with a fixed purpose, which it would lighten his heart to carry out. He ran rapidly through the large outer hall, past the long oak table, at which Hereward and his companions were drinking. As he passed the young lord he cast on him a look so full of meaning, that though Hereward knew not what the meaning was, it startled him, and for a moment softened him. Did he mean him well? Or had he some grudge against him, which made him undertake this journey willingly and out of spite? For an instant Hereward was in doubt. He would stop the letter at all risks. 'Hold him!' he cried to his comrades.

But Martin turned to him, laid his finger on his lips, smiled kindly, and saying 'You promised!' caught up a loaf from the table, slipped from amongst them like a snake, and darted through the door, and out of the house. They followed him to the great gate, and there stopped, some cursing, some laughing. To give Martin Lightfoot a yard's start was never to come up with him again.

'Now lads,' said Hereward, 'home with you all, and make your peace with your fathers. In this house you never drink ale again.'

They looked at him, surprised.



LADY GODIVA ENTRUSTING MARTIN WITH THE LETTER

'You are disbanded, my gallant army. Outlawed I shall be, before the week is out; and unless you wish to be outlawed too, you will obey orders, and go home.'

'We will follow you to the world's end,' cried some.

'To the rope's end, lads: that is all you will get in my company. Go home with you.' And he went in and shut the gates after him, leaving them astonished.

Five days later, Martin Lightfoot came back with the news that Hereward had been outlawed by the King; and the next day, after he had paid a visit to his uncle Brand, Prior of Peterborough Abbey, Hereward left his home and began his life of adventure.

CHAPTER 2

How Hereward slew the White Bear

It was four o'clock on a May morning when Hereward set out to see the world, with good armour on his back, a good weapon by his side, a good horse between his knees, and—rare luxury in those penniless, though otherwise plentiful days—good money in his purse. What could a lad of eighteen want more, who, under the hard family rule of those times, had known nothing of a father's, and but little of a mother's, love?

As he rode on, slowly though cheerfully, as a man who will not tire his horse at the beginning of a long day's journey, and knows not where he shall pass the night, he was aware of a man on foot coming up behind him at a slow, steady, wolf-like trot, which in spite of its slowness gained ground on him so fast that he saw at once that the man could be no common runner.

The man came up; and behold, he was none other than Martin Lightfoot.

'What! are you here?' asked Hereward, suspiciously,

and half cross at seeing any visitor from the old world which he had just cast off. 'Why have you come?'

Martin's tongue was hanging out of his mouth like a running hound's: but he seemed, like a hound, to perspire through his mouth; for he answered without the least sign of distress, without even pulling in his tongue.

'Because I am going with you.'

'Going with me?' said Hereward; 'what can I do for you?'

'I can do for you,' said Martin.

'What?'

'Groom your horse, wash your shirt, clean your weapons, find your inn, fight your enemies, cheat your friends—anything and everything. You are going to see the world. I am going with you.'

'You can be my servant? A very slippery one, I expect,' said Hereward, looking down on him with some suspicion.

'Some are not the rogues they seem. I can keep my secrets and yours too.'

'Before I can trust you with my secrets, I shall expect to know some of yours,' said Hereward.

'I was born in Ireland, in Waterford town. My mother was an English slave. Her master, my father that was (I shall know him again, his name is Thord Gunlaugsson), got tired of her, and wanted to give her away to one of his soldiers. She would not have that; so he hung her up hand and foot, and beat her till she died. There was an abbey hard by, and the Church laid on him a penance—all that they dared get out of him—that he should give me to the monks, being then a seven-years' boy. Well, I grew up in that abbey; they taught me singing: but I liked better learning ballads and hearing stories of ghosts and wizards, such as I used to tell you. I'll tell you plenty more whenever you're tired. Then they made me work; and that I never could bear at all. Then

they beat me every day ; and that I could bear still less : but always I stuck to my book, for one thing I saw—that learning is power, my lord ; and that the reason why the monks are masters of the lands is, they are scholars, and you fighting men are none. Then I fell in love (as young blood will) with an Irish girl, when I was seventeen years old ; and when they found out that, they held me down on the floor and beat me till I was nearly dead. They put me in prison for a month ; and I went nearly mad. They let me out, thinking I could do no more harm to man or lass ; and when I found out how profitable folly was, foolish I remained, at least as foolish as seemed good to me. But one night I got into the abbey church, stole therefrom that which I have with me now and which shall serve you and me in good stead yet—out and away aboard a ship, and off into the Norway sea. But after a voyage or two I was wrecked on the coast near here, and begging my way inland, met with your father, and took service with him, as I have taken service now with you.’

‘Now, what has made you take service with me ?’

‘Because you are you.’

‘Give me none of your parables and dark sayings, but speak out like a man. What can you see in me that you should share an outlaw’s fortune with me ?’

‘I had run away from a monastery ; so had you. I hated the monks ; so did you. I liked to tell stories,—since I found it best to shut my mouth I tell them to myself all day long, sometimes all night too. When I found out you liked to hear them, I loved you all the more. Then they told me not to speak to you ; I held my tongue. I bided my time. I knew you would be outlawed some day. I knew you would turn Viking, and kill giants and wizards, and win yourself honour and glory ; and I knew I should have my share in it. I never loved you as I do now. You let me take that letter safe,

like a true hero. You let yourself be outlawed, like a true hero. You made up your mind to see the world, like a true hero. You are the master for me, and with you I will live and die. And now I can talk no more.'

'And with me you shall live and die,' said Hereward, pulling up his horse, and frankly holding out his hand to his new friend.

Martin Lightfoot took his hand, kissed it, licked it almost, as a dog would have done. 'I am your man,' he said, 'Amen; and true man I will prove to you, if you will prove true to me.' And he dropped quietly back behind Hereward's horse, as if the business of his life was settled, and his mind utterly at rest.

'There is one more likeness between us,' said Hereward, after a few minutes' thought. 'If I have robbed a church, you have robbed one too. What is this precious spoil which is to serve me and you in such good stead?'

Martin drew from inside his shirt and under his waistband a small battle-axe, and handed it up to Hereward. It was a tool the like of which in shape Hereward had seldom seen, and never its equal in beauty. It was made of the finest steel, inlaid with gold letters, the work probably of some Tartar or Persian; one of those magic weapons, brought, men knew not how, out of the East, which were handed down from father to son in many a Norse family, and sung of in many a Norse song.

'Look at it,' said Martin Lightfoot. 'There is magic in it. It must bring us luck. Whoever holds that must kill his man. Devils and spirits forged it—I know that. Handle it, feel its balance; but no—do not handle it too much. There is a devil in it, who would make you kill me. Whenever I play with it I long to kill a man. It would be so easy—so easy. Give it me back, my lord, give it me back, lest the devil come through the handle into your hand, and possess you.'


Hereward laughed, and gave him back his battle-axe.

But he had hardly less doubt of the magic virtues of such a weapon than had Martin himself.

‘Magical or not, you will not have to hit a man twice with that, Martin, my lad. So we two outlaws are both well armed; and having neither wife nor child, land nor cattle to lose, ought to be a match for any six honest men who may have a grudge against us, and yet have sound reasons at home for running away.’

And so those two went northward through the green forest of Brunswald and northward through merry Sherwood, and were not seen in that land again for many a year. Of Hereward’s doings for the next few months nothing is known. All that the chroniclers say is that he was beyond Northumberland with Gilbert of Ghent, one of those valiant Flemings that settled along the east and north-east coast of Scotland in the eleventh century. Amongst them Gilbert of Ghent seems to have been a notable personage, to judge by the great house which he kept, and the squires in training for the honour of knighthood who fed at his table.

There Hereward lived, doubtless happily enough, fighting and hunting, so that as yet the pains and penalties of exile did not press very hardly upon him. The handsome, wilful, good-humoured lad had become in a few weeks the darling of Gilbert’s ladies, and the envy of all his knights and gentlemen. Hereward the singer, harp-player, dancer, Hereward the rider and hunter, was in all mouths: but he himself was discontented at having as yet fallen in with no adventure worthy of a man; and he looked curiously and longingly at the menagerie of wild beasts enclosed in strong wooden cages, which Gilbert kept in one corner of the great court-yard, to try with them, at Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide, the courage of the young gentlemen who were candidates for the honour of knighthood. But after looking over the bulls and stags, wolves and bears, Hereward settled it in his mind that there was

none worthy of his steel, save one huge white bear, whom no man had yet dared to face. There was a mystery about the brute which charmed Hereward. He was said to be half-human, perhaps wholly human; to be a son of the Fairy Bear. He had, like his fairy father, iron claws; he had human intellect, and understood human speech, and the arts of war,—at least so all the people in the place believed. 

Meanwhile Hereward made a friend. Among all the ladies of Gilbert's household, however kind they were inclined to be to him, he took a fancy only to one—a little girl of ten years old. Alftruda was her name. He liked to amuse himself with this child, without, as he fancied, any danger of falling in love; for already his dreams of love were of the highest kind; and an Emir's daughter, or a Princess of Constantinople, was the very lowest at which he aimed. Alftruda was beautiful, too, exceedingly, and, it may be, vain enough to repay his attentions in good earnest. Moreover she was English, as he was, and royal likewise. Between the English lad, then, and the English maiden grew up in a few weeks an innocent friendship, which had almost become more than friendship through the intervention of the Fairy Bear.

For as Hereward was coming in one afternoon from hunting, with Martin Lightfoot trotting behind, on reaching the court-yard gates he was aware of screams and shouts within, tumult and terror among man and beast. Hereward tried to force his horse in at the gate. The beast stopped and turned, snorting with fear; and no wonder; for in the midst of the court-yard stood the Fairy Bear; his white mane bristled up till he seemed twice as big as any of the sober brown bears which Hereward yet had seen: his long neck and cruel visage turning about in search of prey. A dead horse, its back broken by a single blow of the paw, and two or three writhing dogs, showed that the beast was in a wild fury. The court-yard was utterly

empty : but from the ladies' chamber came shrieks and shouts not only of women but of men ; and knocking at the chamber door, adding her screams to those inside, was a little white figure, which Hereward recognized as Alfruda's. They had shut themselves inside, leaving the child out ; and now dared not open the door, as the bear swung and rolled towards it, looking savagely right and left for a fresh victim.

Hereward leaped from his horse, and, drawing his sword, rushed forward with a shout which made the bear turn round.

He looked once back at the child ; then round again at Hereward ; and, making up his mind to take the largest morsel first, made straight at him with a growl which there was no mistaking.

He was within two paces ; then he rose on his hind legs, a head and shoulders taller than Hereward, and lifted the iron talons high in air. Hereward knew that there was but one spot at which to strike ; and he struck true and strong, before the iron paw could fall, right on the nose of the monster.

He heard the dull crash of the steel ; he felt the sword jammed tight. He shut his eyes for an instant, fearing lest, as in dreams, his blow had come to nought ; lest his sword had turned aside, or melted like water in his hand, and the next moment would find him crushed to earth, blinded and stunned. Something tugged at his sword. He opened his eyes, and saw the huge carcass bend, reel, roll slowly over to one side, dead, tearing out of his hand the sword which was firmly fixed into the skull.

Hereward stood awhile staring at the beast like a man astonished at what he himself had done. He had had his first adventure, and he had conquered. He was now a champion—a hero of the heroes. He had done this deed. What was there after this which he might not do ? And he stood there staring, and dreaming over renown to come,

a true pattern of the half-savage hero of those rough times, capable of all vices except cowardice, and capable, too, of all virtues save humility.

'Do you not see,' said Martin Lightfoot's voice close by, 'that there is a fair lady trying to thank you, while you are so rude or so proud that you will not give her one look?'

It was true. Little Alfruda had been clinging to him for five minutes past. He took the child up in his arms and kissed her with pure kisses, which for a moment softened his hard heart; then, setting her down, he turned to Martin.

'I have done it, Martin.'

'Yes, you have done it; I saw you. What will the old folks at home say to this?'

'What care I?'

Martin Lightfoot shook his head, and drew out his knife.

'What is that for?' said Hereward.

'When the master kills the game, the servant can but skin it. We may sleep warm under this fur in many a cold night by sea and moor.'

'Nay,' said Hereward, laughing; 'when the master kills the game he must first carry it home. Let us take it, and set it up against the door there, to astonish the brave knights inside.' And stooping down, he attempted to lift the huge carcase: but in vain. At last, with Martin's help, he got it fairly on his shoulders, and the two dragged their burden to the chamber, and dashed it against the door, shouting with all their might to those within to open it.

Windows, it must be remembered, were in those days so few that the folks inside had remained quite unaware of what was going on without.

The door was opened cautiously enough; and out looked two or three knights who had taken shelter with the ladies. Whatever they were going to say the ladies forestalled,

for, rushing out across the prostrate bear, they overwhelmed Hereward with praises and thanks.

'You must be knighted at once,' cried they. 'You have knighted yourself by that single blow.'

'It is a pity,' said one of the knights to the others, 'that he did not give that blow to himself instead of to the bear.'

'Unless some means are found,' said another, 'of taking down this boy's conceit, life will soon be not worth living here.'

'Either he must take ship,' said a third, 'and look for adventures elsewhere, or I must.'

Martin Lightfoot heard those words; and knowing that envy and hatred, like all other vices in those rough times, were apt to take very startling and unmistakable shapes, kept his eye accordingly on those three knights.

Who now but Hereward was in all men's mouths? The minstrels made ballads on him; the lasses sang his praises as they danced upon the green. Gilbert's lady gave him the seat, and all the honours, of a belted knight, though knight he was none. However, he was soon after obliged to leave Gilbert's house, on account of the jealousy of Gilbert's knights. Three of them, indeed (the three whom Martin had noticed), tried to take him by surprise and kill him when they were hunting together; but he and faithful Martin proved a match for them. From this adventure Hereward began to win for himself the famous nickname of "Wake": the Watcher, whom no man ever took unawares.

CHAPTER 3

How Hereward won the Magic Sword, Brain-biter

THE next place in which Hereward appeared was far away in the south-west, upon the shores of Cornwall.

He arrived on board a merchant ship carrying wine, and intending to bring back tin. The merchants had told him of one Alef, a small king living at Gweek, up the Helford river, who increased his wealth by sailing out at times as a pirate, or sea-robber, in company with his Danish kinsmen from Ireland. Hereward, who believed, with most Englishmen of the East Country, that Cornwall still produced giants, some of them with two and even three heads, hoped that Alef would show him some adventure worthy of his sword. And, sure enough, when with his merchant friends he entered Alef's hall, he seemed to have got his wish. At the head of the table was Alef himself, who was just setting to work to drink himself stupid ; by his side sat a lovely dark-haired girl, with great gold bracelets on her wrists and a great gold brooch fastening her shawl ; and next to her again, feeding her with dainty morsels cut off with his own dagger, sat a very giant, the biggest man that Hereward had ever seen, with high cheek bones and small eyes looking out from a greasy mass of bright red hair and beard.

No questions were asked of the newcomers. They sat down with the huge dark-haired Cornishmen, Alef's fighting men, in silence and, according to the laws of good old Cornish hospitality, were allowed to eat and drink their fill before they spoke a word. Then Alef bade the merchants welcome, as men he knew ; and looking keenly at Hereward, said :

'And you, fair Sir, by what name shall I call you, and what service can I do for you ? You look more like an Earl's son than a merchant, and have surely come here for other things beside tin.'

'Health to King Alef,' said Hereward, raising his cup. 'Who I am I will tell to no one but Alef himself : but an Earl's son I am,—though an outlaw and a rover. My lands are the breadth of the sole of my boot. My plough is my sword, my treasure is my good right hand. Nothing

I have, and nothing I need, save to serve noble kings and earls, and win for myself a champion's fame. If you have battles to fight, tell me, that I may fight them for you. If you have none, thank God for His peace; and let me eat and drink and go in peace.'

'King Alef needs neither man nor boy to fight his battles,' shouted the red-bearded giant, 'as long as I, Ironhook, sit in his hall.'

Hereward had hoped to find giants in Cornwall, and behold he had found one at once; and true to his resolve to defy and fight every man who was willing to defy and fight him, he turned on his elbow and stared at Ironhook in scorn; and was about to utter some contemptuous words which might provoke the hoped-for quarrel, when he noticed the beautiful princess watching him with a strange look, admiring, warning, imploring. When she saw that he noticed her, she put her finger on her lips, as though begging him to be patient and silent.

Hereward was not wanting in quick wit or chivalrous feeling. He had observed the rough devotion of the giant to the lady. He had observed, too, that she shrank from it; that she turned away with loathing when he offered her his own cup, while he answered by a dark and deadly frown.

Was there an adventure here? Was she persecuted by this Ironhook, or by her father, or by both? Did she need Hereward's help? If so, she was so lovely that he could not refuse it. So, for her sake, he swallowed his pride, and answered the rude giant amiably enough.

The next morning, as Hereward was washing in the stream, Martin Lightfoot told him what he had heard from the servants.

'You saw that lady with the red-headed fellow?' he said. 'I saw that you saw. Well, if you will believe me, that man has no more noble blood than I have. He is a No-man's son, who came down from Scotland with a crew

of pirates, and has made himself the master of this drunken old king, and the darling of all his men, and now will marry his daughter whether Alef will or not.'

'I will kill the fellow,' said Hereward, 'and carry her off, before twenty-four hours are over.'

'Softly, softly, my young master. The poor lady is betrothed already to a son of old King Ranald of Waterford in Ireland.'

'Why, he is a kinsman of mine,' said Hereward. 'All the more reason that I should kill this ruffian.'

'Well, well, wilful heart must have its way,' said Martin. 'But have a care lest you make matters worse instead of better for the princess.'

Hereward soon made an opportunity of picking a quarrel with the giant Ironhook; and they arranged to meet privately and fight it out. The princess, however, came to know of the quarrel, and by a trick got possession of Ironhook's magic sword, Brain-biter, and hid it under the altar of the little church; for she feared for young Hereward. Ironhook raged and cursed when he found it was gone, but at last had to go without it. The secret of the fight was soon out, and Alef and his fighting men and the Danish followers of Ironhook hurried off to see the combat. When they reached the place the two were already fighting. The combat seemed at the first glance to be one between a grown man and a child, so unequal was the size of the combatants. But the second look showed that the advantage was by no means with Ironhook. Stumbling to and fro with the broken shaft of a spear sticking in his thigh, he vainly tried to seize Hereward with his iron grip. Hereward, bleeding, but still active and upright, broke away, and sprang round him, watching for an opportunity to strike a deadly blow. The fighting men rushed forward with yells. Alef shouted to the combatants to stop: but before the party could reach them, Hereward's opportunity had come. Ironhook stumbled forward. Hereward leapt

aside, and spying an unguarded spot, drove his sword deep into the giant's body, and rolled him over upon the grass. Then arose shouts of fury.

'Foul play!' cried one.

And others, taking up the cry, called out, 'Magic!' and 'Treason!'

Hereward stood over Ironhook as he lay rolling and foaming on the ground.

'Killed by a boy at last!' groaned he. 'If I had but had my sword—my Brain-biter, which that witch stole from me last night!'—and amid foul curses and bitter tears of shame his mortal spirit fled to its doom.

Ironhook's Danish housecarles rushed in on Hereward, who had enough to do to keep them at arm's length by long sweeps of his sword.

He was now nearly at his wits' end; the housecarles had closed round him in a ring with the intention of seizing him; and however well he might defend his front, he might be crippled at any moment from behind; but in the very nick of time Martin Lightfoot burst through the crowd, set himself heel to heel with his master, and broke out, not with threats, but with a good-humoured laugh. 'Danes,' he cried, 'are you not ashamed to call this red-headed Scot your lord, when you can have a true earl's son to lead you?' Martin's words had the desired effect. The Danes who had followed Ironhook dropped their weapons, and stepped back. Alef and his Cornishmen were glad enough to be rid of the Scottish bully, and secretly had wished Hereward well all along. So the crowd dispersed, and left Hereward and Martin free to go their way.

That night, before they went down to the ship, the princess came secretly to Hereward, and put into his hand Ironhook's great sword, Brain-biter.

'Take it,' she said. 'It is yours now. It is magical. Whoever smites with it, need never smite again. Now, promise me one thing before you go.'

'What is that?' asked Hereward.

'Go to my beloved, Sigtryg, son of King Ranald of Waterford, over the sea. Take him this ring, and tell him to come and claim me soon as his wife, lest he run the danger of losing me for ever; for I am in a hard case here.'

And Hereward promised, and he and Martin sailed away.

Well did Hereward keep his promise to the Cornish princess. For he returned in due time with Sigtryg, Ranald's son, and his men, and carried her back to Waterford, where at last she became the wife of Sigtryg, her beloved.

And this was how Hereward won the magic sword, Brain-biter, with which he fought all his battles afterwards, except the last.

CHAPTER 4

How Hereward sailed to Flanders and won a fair Lady's Love

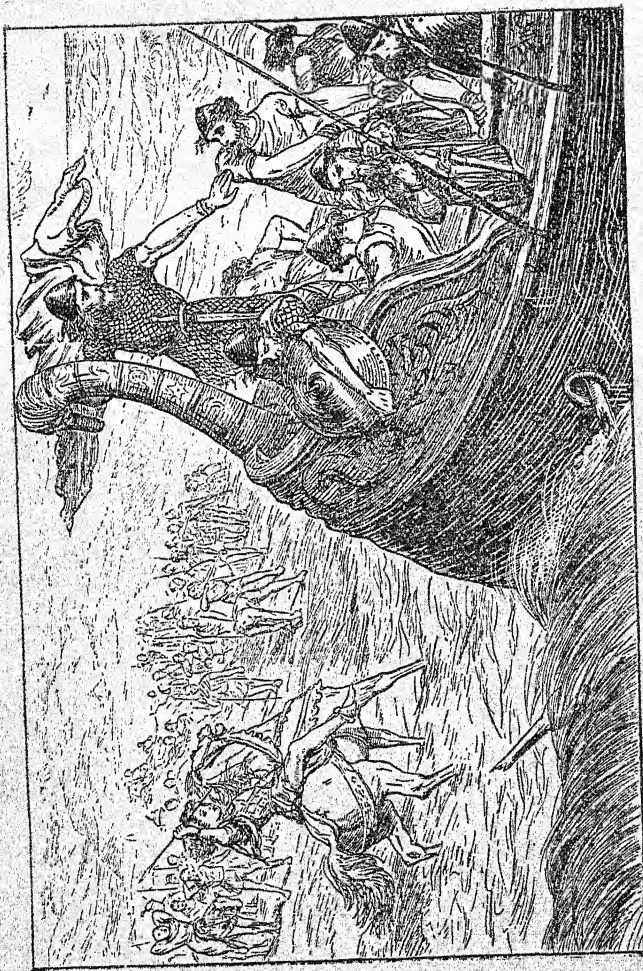
HEREWARD stayed some time with old King Ranald of Waterford, and fought his battles; and in all things showed himself a daring and wakeful captain, as careless of his own life as of the lives of other folks. But at last a great home-sickness seized him. He would go back and see the old home. So Hereward asked King Ranald for ships, and at once got two good vessels, as payment for his brave deeds. As for men, there were fifty fellows as desperate as Hereward himself, ready to take service with him for any adventure. Among them were Hereward's two nephews, Siward the Red and Siward the White, who had come to Ranald seeking adventures, like their uncle.

They sailed away; but the voyage did not prosper. They had bad weather all the way, and during a storm one of the ships was wrecked. At last, after many adventures, the remaining ship ran aground on the shores of Flanders, not far from the town of St. Omer. The Lord of St. Omer would have made them prisoners; but young Arnoul,

grandson of Baldwin, the great Marquis of Flanders, claimed Hereward and his men as his own friends, because he had been riding on the shore when Hereward was wrecked and had a boyish admiration for the Vikings, or sea-adventurers, and said he wanted them to teach him to be one himself. So Hereward was brought as an honoured friend to St. Omer, and took service under the Marquis Baldwin. He did not at first reveal his name, but called himself 'No-man's son.'

Hereward soon had work to do. The Marquis ruled over a large tract of country, which includes the lands now called Belgium and Holland, as well as a part of the north of France. He had many vassals, or lords, who acknowledged him as their sovereign, and sometimes some of these gave him trouble. (One of these, the Count of Guisnes, had rebelled, and refused to acknowledge the Marquis's sovereignty. So the Lord of St. Omer, in obedience to Baldwin's command, marched against the castle of Guisnes with all his knights and men-at-arms, and Hereward and his Vikings, and little Arnoul riding alongside in glee; for it was the first war he had ever seen.

Now in St. Omer lived a beautiful and rich lady called Torfrida. Her father was dead, and she lived with her mother, under the guardianship of Baldwin of Flanders and of her uncle. Her uncle, who was a priest and the abbot of a large monastery, partly from good-nature and partly from a pious hope that she might become a nun and leave all her wealth to the Church, made her his pupil, and taught her the mysteries of books: and she proved to be an unusually clever scholar. Among other studies she took up the study of magic, and became very learned in that forbidden art. Pure she was, generous, and noble-hearted, with a deep and sincere longing after knowledge for its own sake; but very ambitious. She laughed to scorn the idea of becoming a nun; and laughed to scorn equally the notion of marrying any of the knights whom



HEREWARD WRECKED ON THE COAST OF FLANDERS

she had yet seen. Her uncle and Marquis Baldwin between them could have compelled her, an orphan heiress, to marry whom they liked. But Torfrida had hitherto managed both the Abbot and the Marquis successfully. Lances had been broken, helmets split, and more than one life lost in her honour; but she had only, as the best safeguard she could devise, given some hint of encouragement to a knight called Sir Ascelin, the most renowned and polite bully of those parts, by bestowing on him a scrap of ribbon and bidding him keep it against all comers. By this means she made sure of the personal chastisement of all other youths who dared to desire to marry her, while she by no means bound herself to her champion, Sir Ascelin.

The arrival of Hereward and his men had, of course, stirred the quiet current of her life, and, indeed, of St. Omer, which was usually as stagnant as the waters in the dykes round its wall. Who the unknown champion was (for his name of 'No-man's son' showed at least that he was concealing something), whence he had come, and what had been his previous exploits, busied all the gossips of the town. All the talk and guesses about him Torfrida heard, and thought within herself that, whoever he was, she would like to see him again.

Then came the news how, on the very first day he had gone out against the Count of Guisnes, Hereward had gallantly rescued a wounded man. A day or two after came fresh news of some brave deed; and then another and another. And when Hereward returned, after a week's victorious fighting, all the people of St. Omer were in the street to stare at him.

Then Torfrida heard enough, and more than enough, of Hereward and his courage.

And when they came riding in, the great Marquis at the head of them all, with the Lord of St. Omer on one side of him, and on the other Hereward, Torfrida looked down

on him out of her window and loved him, once and for all, with all her heart and soul.

And Hereward looked up at her and her dark blue eyes and black hair, and thought her the fairest thing he had ever seen, and asked who she might be, and heard. And he thought for many a day of nothing but her.

So he tried to see her, and win her love, and she tried to see him, and win his love. But neither saw the other for awhile; and it might have been better for one of them had they never seen each other again.

If Torfrida could have foreseen—why, if she were true woman, she would have done exactly what she did, and taken the bitter with the sweet, as we all must do in this life, unless we wish to live and die alone.

CHAPTER 5

How Hereward won the Magic Armour

TORFRIDA had special opportunities of hearing about Hereward; for young Arnoul was to her almost a brother, and gladly told her the news.

He had now had his first taste of the royal game of war. He had seen Hereward fight by day, and heard him tell stories over the camp fire by night. Hereward's beauty, Hereward's courage, Hereward's songs, Hereward's strange adventures and wanderings, were for ever in the young boy's mouth; and he spent hours in helping Torfrida to guess who the great unknown might be; and then went back to Hereward, and artlessly told him of his beautiful friend, and how they had talked of him, and of nothing else; and in a week or two Hereward knew all about Torfrida; and Torfrida knew—what filled her heart with joy—that Hereward was bound to no lady-love, and owned (so he had told Arnoul) no mistress except the sword on his thigh.

Whereby there had grown up in the hearts of both of them a mutual interest, which easily became the parent of love.

One day Arnoul burst into Torfrida's room in great excitement. He had found out, he said, who this mysterious stranger was. Baldwin the great Marquis had questioned Hereward, it seems, and he had confessed that he was the son of Leofric, Earl of Mercia.

'He is no low-born man,' cried Arnoul, joyfully; 'he is as noble as I am—a great Earl's son.'

The discovery of Hereward's rank did not, doubtless, lessen Torfrida's fancy for him. She was ambitious enough, and proud enough of her own family, to be very glad that her heart had strayed away—as it must needs stray somewhere—to the son of the third greatest man in England. As for his being an outlaw, that mattered little. He might be inlawed, and rich and powerful, any day in those uncertain times: and for the present, his being an outlaw only made him the more interesting to her. Women like to pity their lovers. Sometimes—may all good beings reward them for it—they love merely because they pity. And Torfrida found it pleasant to pity the insolent young fellow who certainly never dreamed of pitying himself.

About this time came the annual tournament at Poitiers, in France, where all the noblest knights of France would assemble, to win their honour and ladies' love by hewing at each others' bodies. Thither, too, over three hundred and fifty miles of bad road, the best knights of Flanders must go; and with them Hereward. Though he was not yet a knight, he was allowed in Flanders, as he had been in Scotland, to take his place among that honourable company. For though he still refused the honour of knighthood, on the ground that he had as yet done no deed deserving of it, he was held by others to have deserved it again and again, and all the more from his modesty in declining it.

So away they all went to Poitiers, a very gallant company ; while Torfrida watched them go from her window.

And when they had passed down the street, young Arnoul ran into the house with eyes full of tears, because he was not allowed to go likewise ; and with a message for Torfrida from no other than Hereward himself.

'I was to tell you this and no more,' he said : 'that if Hereward meets the knight who wears your ribbon in the tournament, he will win it from him.'

The next few days seemed as long as years : but she could wait. After that message she felt sure of him. She had thought of practising her magic arts to win his love ; but now she felt she had no need of charms. 'Perhaps,' thought she, as she looked in her mirror, 'I was my own charm.' And indeed she was so beautiful that she had a fair right to say so.

At last news came.

Torfrida was sitting over her books ; her mother, as usual, was praying in the churches, when her old nurse came in. A knight was at the door. He said his name was Siward the White, and he came from Hereward.

From Hereward ! He was at least alive : he might be wounded, though ; and she rushed out of the chamber into the hall, looking more beautiful than ever ; her colour heightened by the quick beating of her heart ; her dark hair, worn loose and long, after the fashion of those days, streaming around her and behind her.

A handsome young man stood in the doorway, armed from head to foot. His face was hidden by his helmet.

'You are Siward, Hereward's nephew ?'

He bowed in assent. She took him by the hands, and said :

'You are welcome. Hereward is—alive ?'

'Alive and gay, and all the more gay at being able to send to the Lady Torfrida by me something which was once hers, and now is hers once more.'

And he drew from his bosom the ribbon she had given to Sir Ascelin.

She almost snatched it from his hand, in her delight at recovering her ribbon.

‘How—where—did he get this?’

‘He saw it, in the thick of the tournament, on the helmet of a knight who, he knew, had vowed to wound him or take his life; and, wishing to give him a chance of fulfilling his vow, rode him down, horse and man. The knight’s French friends attacked us in force; and we, with Hereward at our head, beat them off. Three more knights, with their horses, fell before Hereward’s lance.’

‘And what of this ribbon?’

‘He sends it to its owner. Let her say what shall be done with it.’

Something in his voice made Torfrida look at the knight more closely. And as she looked she thought that surely this man could not be the youth Siward. His face could hardly be seen, hidden by the helmet. But his long moustache was that of a grown man; his vast breadth of shoulder, his hard hand, his sturdy limbs,—they surely did not belong to the slim youth whom she had seen from her window riding at Hereward’s side. And, as she looked, she saw upon his hand, pricked out in blue, the picture of the bear, Hereward’s crest.

‘You are deceiving me!’ she cried, turning first very pale, and then blushing very red. ‘You—you are Hereward himself!’

The knight was silent.

‘You *are* Hereward,’ she cried again. ‘I know you! I know that device upon your hand. My hero, how I have longed for this moment! Here, take my ribbon, wear it before all the world as my knight, and guard it as only you can; and let all know that Torfrida is your lady-love.’

And with hands trembling with excitement she bound the ribbon round his helmet.

'Yes! I am Hereward,' he shouted; 'Hereward the Viking, the brain-smiter, the land-thief, the sea-thief, the feeder of wolf and raven—Aoi! When I was a boy, I was a match for giants. How much more now that I am a man whom a fair lady loves? Many a champion has been afraid of my very look. How much more now that I wear Torfrida's gift? Aoi!'

Torfrida had often heard that wild battle-cry of Aoi! But she trembled as she heard it close to her ears; and saw, from his flashing eye, the fierce temper of the man to whom she had given her love. She laid her hand upon his lips.

'Silence! Silence for pity's sake! Remember you are in a maiden's house; and think of her good fame.'

Hereward at once calmed himself; and then, holding her at arm's length, gazed upon her.

'I was mad for a moment,' he said. 'Forgive me, lady. But is it not enough to make me mad just to look at you? We are rough lovers, we English: but those who trust us find us true.'

'And can I trust you?' she asked, trembling.

'On Christ's Cross I swear it,' he said, and took the cross that hung on her neck, and kissed it. 'You only I love, you only I will love; and we shall be wedded man and wife.'

'Then come,' said Torfrida; 'I have something to show you.'

She led him into a small room where he saw rich dresses hung round the wall, and heavy boxes barred and padlocked.

'These are treasures,' said she, 'which many a knight and nobleman has coveted and wanted to get by marrying me. But they are all still mine—and if you are but true to me, all mine is yours. Lift the lid of this box,' she added, 'for it is too heavy for my arms.'

Hereward did so; and saw within golden cups and

bracelets; horns of ivory and silver, bags of coin, and among them a mail shirt and a helmet, on which he looked with admiration and longing. Torfrida took the armour out and held it up for him to see.

'This is the work of wizards! This was never made by mortal man!' said Hereward, astonished at the extreme delicacy and smallness of the steel rings of which the mail shirt was composed, and the richness of the gold and silver with which the helmet was inlaid.

'Yes; it is magic armour,' said Torfrida. 'All spears will turn from it, and all swords will be broken on it. He who wears it need fear no wound. But there is a curse attached to it. My ancestor, Torfrid, won it in battle from a Saracen Emir; and when he died he laid a curse upon it, that whosoever of his descendants should lose that armour in fight, should die childless, without a son to wield a sword. And therefore it is that none of my ancestors since, brave as they have been, have dared to wear this armour. And now, Hereward mine, dare you wear this magic armour, and face old Torfrid's curse?'

'What is there I dare not do?'

'But think—if you lose it, in you your family must end.'

'Then let it end. I accept the curse.'

And he put the armour on.

Torfrida looked at him in pride and exultation. 'It is yours—the magic armour! Wear it in the forefront of the battle, as my knight and hero!'

CHAPTER 6

How Hereward rode to the War in his Shirt

Soon after this Hereward rode away again to the wars. This time it was the rough people of Holland that were giving the Marquis of Flanders trouble; and Baldwin entrusted the work of subduing them to his younger son



HOW HERWARD WON THE MAGIC ARMOUR

Robert, called the Viking. Robert gathered as many valiant ruffians as he could find into his army; and when he heard of the Viking who had subdued the Count of Guisnes, it seemed to him that he was the man to do his work. So Hereward and his men joined him, and rode off to help to punish the rebellious Hollanders. And these found themselves as sheep brought to the slaughter before the cunning Hereward, whom they thought a wizard, on account of his craft and magic armour.

While Hereward was away at the wars, Torfrida's mind was full of doubts. Had she been wise to give her love to this wild sea-rover of whom she knew so little! She feared, too, that when their betrothal was known, she might be laughed at by the polished knights and ladies of the Court for choosing a rough Englishman as a husband.

But when, after a few months, Hereward returned from his first campaign in Holland, covered with glory and renown, all smiles, and beauty, and health, and good-humour, and gratitude for the magic armour which had preserved him unhurt, then Torfrida forgot all her fears, and thought herself the happiest maiden alive for twenty-four hours at least.

And then the old fears came back again. Her lover's life had been passed among half-brutal and wild adventurers; and, compared with those of the French and Flemish knights, his manners were often very rough. Especially when he had taken too much to drink he grew rude, boastful and quarrelsome. He would sing of his own brave deeds in the hall before the knights and ladies, and boast aloud of his adventures. And Torfrida blushed for shame as she saw the knights and ladies secretly sneering at his bad manners. She grew sometimes cold, sometimes contemptuous, sometimes altogether fierce; and shed bitter tears in secret, when she was complimented on the 'modesty' of her young barbarian.

But Torfrida was a brave maiden ; and, what was more, she loved him with all her heart. So she set herself to teach and train the wild outlaw into her ideal of a very perfect knight.

She talked to him of modesty and humility, the root of all virtues ; of chivalry and self-sacrifice ; of respect to the weak, and mercy to the fallen ; of devotion to God, and awe of His commandments. She set before him the example of ancient heroes and philosophers, of saints and martyrs ; and as much awed him by her learning as by the new world of higher and purer morality, which was opened for the first time to the wandering Viking.

He, for his part, was ready to learn. Taught by a woman who loved him, he could listen to humiliating truths, which he would have sneered at had they come from the lips of a priest. Often he rebelled ; often he broke loose ; but gradually the influence of woman's tact, and woman's purity, began to soften his manners and ennoble his character. But one evening he forgot all her lessons, and the result was a very strange adventure.

The Great Marquis had sent for his son, Robert, to Bruges, his capital city, before he set out for another campaign in Holland ; and then made him a great feast, to which he invited Torfrida and her mother. For his wife, Adela of France, the Queen-Countess, had heard so much of Torfrida's beauty that she sent for her to be one of her ladies in her court ; and Torfrida's mother, who was an old friend of Adela's, of course was highly honoured by such promotion for her daughter.

So they went to Bruges, and Hereward and his men went with them ; and they feasted and drank and sang. After awhile Hereward, who had drunk much wine, began to brag and boast as he sat by Torfrida's side. For some knight began to tell of a wonderful mare, called Swallow from her swiftness, that was to be found in one of the islands of the river Scheldt in Holland, and was

famous for her speed in all the country round ; and said, moreover, that Hereward might as well have brought that mare home with him from the war as a trophy.

To which Hereward answered, in his boasting style, that he would bring home that mare, or anything else that he had a mind to.

'You will find it not so easy,' said the knight. 'Her owner, they say, is a very strong man, a horse-breeder, called Dirk Hammerhand. They say his arm has seven men's strength ; and whosoever visits him, he challenges to give and take a blow : but no man that has taken a blow from him has lived afterwards.'

'Hereward will need his magic helmet, if he tries that adventure,' said another, laughing.

'Magic helmet ?' cried Hereward, furiously. 'What do I care for armour or for magic ? I tell you I will go in my shirt to the war, and bring back that mare single-handed.'

Then there followed high words and quarrelling, till Torfrida blushed for shame. And after the banquet was over, she spoke angrily to Hereward when they were alone.

'So ! You have made me a laughing-stock to these knights. You have scorned my gifts. You have said you do not need my magic armour. Give it back to me then, and go and sleep off the effect of the wine you have drunk.'

'That I will,' laughed Hereward, boisterously. Torfrida turned away disgusted.

'You are drunk,' she said, 'and do not know what you say.'

'Drunk or sober,' he cried, 'I will take you at your word. You shall have your armour back, and I will ride to-morrow to the war in my shirt, and in my shirt I will win that mare or die.'

'That will be very fit for you,' she said, scornfully. And they parted in anger.

That night Martin Lightfoot brought back the magic armour to Torfrida from Hereward. When she saw it, all her anger melted away. She cried : she blamed herself. All night she could not sleep, thinking he would be killed, and his blood would be on her head.

Early in the morning a trumpet sounded in the street. She sprang up and dressed herself quickly, and peeped through the window. There rode down the street Robert le Frison in full armour, and behind him, knight after knight, a wall of shining steel. But by his side rode Hereward, bare-headed, his long yellow curls floating over his shoulders. His boots had golden spurs, a gilt belt held up his sword ; but his only dress was a silk shirt and silk hose. He laughed and sang, and made his horse rear, and tossed his lance in the air, and caught it by the point, as he passed under the window.

She threw open the window, careless of all appearances. She would have called to him : but the words choked her ; and what should she say ?

He looked up boldly, and smiled.

'Farewell, fair lady mine. Drunk I was last night, but not so drunk as to forget a promise.'

And he rode on, while Torfrida rushed away and broke into wild weeping.

CHAPTER 7

How Hereward won Mare Swallow

On a bench at the door of his wooden house sat Dirk Hammerhand, the richest man in the island of Walcheren, which is on the river Scheldt in Holland. As he sat and drank his beer, and watched his herd of horses in the fen, he thought himself a happy man and thanked his gods for his prosperity.

As he looked at the horses, half a mile off, he saw a strange stir among them. They began neighing and pawing round a fourfooted thing in the midst, which plainly had no business there. Whereon he took up a mighty staff, and strode over the fen to see.

He found neither wolf nor badger : but to his exceeding surprise a long lean man, clothed in ragged horseskins, neighing exactly like a horse, and then stooping to eat grass like one. He advanced to do the first thing which came into his head, namely to break the man's back with his staff, and ask him afterwards who he might be. But before he could strike, the man or horse kicked up with its hind legs in his face, and then springing on to the said hind legs ran away with extraordinary swiftness some fifty yards ; after which it went down on all fours and began eating grass again.

'Are you man or devil ?' cried Dirk, somewhat frightened.

The thing looked up. The face at least was human.

'Are you a Christian man ?' it asked, with snorts and neighs.

'What's that to you ?' growled Dirk ; and began to wish a little that he was one, having heard that the sign of the cross was of great virtue in driving away fiends.

'You are not Christian. You worship the old gods ? Then there is hope.'

'Hope of what ?' Dirk was growing more and more frightened.

'Of her, my sister : Ah, my sister, can it be that I shall find you at last, after ten thousand miles, and seven years of woeful wandering ?'

'I have no man's sister here.'

'I speak not of a sister in woman's shape. Mine, alas !—oh woeful prince, oh more woeful princess—eats the herb of the field somewhere in the shape of a mare, as ugly as she was once beautiful, but swifter than the swallow on the wing.'

'I've none such here,' cried Dirk, thoroughly frightened, and glancing uneasily at mare Swallow.

'You have not? Alas, wretched me! It was prophesied to me by the witch that I should find her in the field of one who worshipped the old gods; for had she come across a holy priest, she would have been a woman again, long ago. Whither must I wander afresh!' And the thing began weeping bitterly, and then ate more grass.

'You poor miserable creature,' said Dirk, 'leave off making a beast of yourself awhile, and tell me who you are.'

'I have made no beast of myself, most noble earl, for so you doubtless are. I was made a beast of—a horse of, by a wizard of a certain land, and my sister a mare.'

'You do not say so!' quoth Dirk, who considered such an event quite possible.

'I was a prince, as fair once as I am foul now, and only less fair than my lost sister; and by the enchantments of a cruel magician we became what we are.'

'But you are not a horse, at all events?'

'Am I not? You know, then, more of me than I do of myself,' and it ate more grass. 'But hear the rest of my story. My hapless sister was sold away with me to a merchant: but I, breaking loose from him, fled until I bathed in a magic fountain. At once I recovered my man's shape, and was rejoicing therein, when out of the fountain rose a fairy, and smiled upon me with love.

'She asked me my story, and I told it. And when it was told—"Wretch!" she cried, "and coward, who have deserted your sister in her need. I would have loved you, and made you immortal as myself: but now you shall wander ugly and eating grass, clothed in the horse-hide which has just dropped from your limbs till you find your sister, and bring her to bathe, like you, in this magic well."'

'All good spirits help us! And you are really a prince?'

'As surely,' cried the thing with a voice of sudden rapture,

'as that mare is my sister'; and he rushed at mare Swallow.

'I see, I see, my mother's eyes, my father's nose——'

'But how can she be a princess, man—prince, I mean? She has a foal running by her here.'

'A foal?' said the thing solemnly. 'Let me behold it. Alas, alas, my sister! Your tyrant's threat has come true, that you should be his bride whether you would or not. I see, I see in the features of your son a likeness to his hated face.'

'But this will not do, Master Horse-man; I know that foal's pedigree better than I do my own.'

'Man, man, simple though honest!—Have you never heard of the skill of the wizards of the East? How they transform their victims at night back again into human shape, and by day into the shape of beasts again?'

'Yes—well—I know that——'

'And do you not see how you are deceived? Every night, doubt not, that mare and foal take their human shape again; and every night, perhaps, that foul wizard visits your stable, his wretched bride restored (alas, only for an hour!) into her human shape.'

'A wizard in my stables? That is an ugly guest. But no. I've been into the stables fifty times, to see if that mare was safe. Mare was mare, and foal was foal, Mr. Prince, if I have eyes to see.'

'And what are eyes against enchantments? The moment you opened the door, the spell was cast over them again. You ought to thank your stars that no worse has happened yet; that the enchanter, in fleeing, has not wrung your neck as he went out, or cast a spell on you, which will fire your barns, lame your geese and your horses, and give your wife and yourself some awful disease.'

'All Saints have mercy on me! If the half of this be true, I will turn Christian. I will send for a priest, and be baptized to-morrow!'

'Oh, my sister, my sister! Do you not know me? Do

you answer my caresses with kicks ? Or is your heart, as well as your body, so enchained by that cruel wizard, that you prefer to be his, and scorn your own salvation, leaving me to eat grass till I die ? ’

‘ I say, Prince—I say—What would you have a man to do ? I bought the mare honestly, and I have kept her well. She can’t say anything against me. And whether she be princess or not, I’m unwilling to part with her.’

‘ Keep her then, and keep with her the curse of all the saints and angels. Look down, ye holy saints ’ (and the thing poured out a long string of saints’ names), ‘ and avenge this Christian princess, kept a prisoner by an unbaptized heathen ! May his——’

‘ Don’t, don’t ! ’ roared Dirk. ‘ And don’t look at me like that ’ (for he feared the evil eye), ‘ or I’ll brain you with my staff ! ’

‘ Fool ! If I have lost a horse’s figure, I have not lost his swiftness. Before you could strike, I should have run a mile and back, to curse thee afresh.’ And the thing ran round him, and fell on all fours again, and ate grass.

‘ Mercy, mercy ! And that is more than I ever asked yet of man. But it is hard,’ growled he, ‘ that a man should lose his money, because a rogue sells him a princess in disguise.’

‘ Then sell her again ; sell her, as you value your life, to the first Christian man you meet. And yet no. What matters ? Before a month be over, the seven years’ enchantment will have passed ; and she will return to her own shape, with her son, and vanish from your farm, leaving you to vain repentance ; whereby you will both lose your money, and get her curse. Farewell, and my curse abide with you ! ’

And the thing, without another word, ran right away, neighing as it went, leaving Dirk in a state of utter terror.

He went home. He cursed the mare, he cursed the man who sold her, he cursed the day he saw her, he cursed the

day he was born. He told his story with exaggerations and confusions in plenty to all in the house ; and terror fell on them likewise. No one, that evening, dare go down into the fen to drive the horses up ; while Dirk got very drunk, went to bed, and trembled there all night (as did the rest of the household), expecting the enchanter to enter at every howl of the wind.

The next morning, as Dirk was going about his business with a doleful face, casting stealthy glances at the fen, to see if the mysterious mare was still there, and a chance of his money still left, a man rode up to the door.

He was poorly clothed, with a long rusty sword by his side. A broad hat, long boots, and a bag behind his saddle, showed him to be a traveller, seemingly a horse dealer ; for there followed him two wretched looking horses.

'Heaven save all here,' said he, making the sign of the cross. 'Can any good Christian give me a drink of milk ?'

'Ale, if you like,' said Dirk. 'But who are you, and whence do you come ?'

On any other day, he would have tried to coax his guest to exchange blows with him for his horse and clothes : but this morning his heart was heavy with the thought of the enchanted mare, and he welcomed the chance of selling her to the stranger.

'I am a poor traveller,' said the man, 'and am trying to buy a quiet horse. Do you know of any man who has horses to sell about here ?'

'I have a mare,' said Dirk, 'that is so quiet that a child could ride her with a thread of wool for a bridle. She has a foal, too, running by her. Would you like to see her ?'

The stranger agreed ; and they went down to the fen and looked at the precious mare, whose deeds were afterwards to be sung by many an English fireside. She was the ugliest, as well as the swiftest, of mares ; and it was not till the stranger looked closely at her that he forgot

all her ugliness and began to see the points which showed her strength and speed, and justified her fame.

'She might carry a big man like you through the mud,' said he carelessly: 'but as for speed, one cannot expect that with such a big, ugly head. And if one rode her through a town, the boys would call after one, "All head and no tail."'

'Don't speak against her speed till you have seen it,' said Dirk, angrily. 'Here, lass!'

Dirk was in his heart rather afraid of the 'princess': but he was comforted when she came up to him like a dog.

'She's as sensible as a woman,' said he; and then grumbled to himself, 'perhaps she knows I mean to part with her.'

'Lend me your saddle,' said he to the stranger.

The stranger did so; and Dirk, mounting, galloped her in a ring. There was no doubt of her powers as soon as she began to move.

'I hope you won't remember this against me, madam,' said Dirk to the mare as soon as he got out of the stranger's hearing. 'I can't do less than sell you to a Christian. And certainly I have been as good a master to you as if I'd known who you were; but if you wish to stay with me, you've only to kick me off, and say so; and I'm yours to command.'

'Well, she can gallop a bit,' said the stranger, as Dirk pulled her up and dismounted: 'but an ugly brute she is, nevertheless, and such an one as I should not care to ride, for I am a gay man among the ladies. However, what is your price?'

Dirk named twice as much as he would have taken.

'Half that, you mean.' And the usual bargaining began.

'I tell you what,' said Dirk at last. 'I am a man who has his fancies; and this shall be her price; half your bid and a blow on the head.'

The demon of covetousness had entered Dirk's heart. What if he got the money; brained, or at least disabled the stranger; and so had a chance of selling the mare a second time to some fresh comer?

'You are a strange fellow,' quoth the horse-dealer. 'But so be it.'

Dirk laughed. 'He does not know,' thought he, 'that he has to do with Dirk Hammerhand,' and he clenched his fist in anticipation of his rough joke.

'There,' quoth the stranger, counting out the money carefully, 'is your coin. And there—is your blow on the head.'

And with a blow which sounded over the fen, he knocked Dirk Hammerhand to the ground.

He lay senseless for a moment, and then looked wildly round.

'Villain!' groaned he. 'It was I who was to give the blow, not you!'

'Are you mad?' asked the stranger, as he coolly picked up the coins, which Dirk had scattered in his fall. 'It is the seller's business to take, and the buyer's to give.'

And while Dirk roared in vain for help, he leapt on Swallow, and rode off shouting.

'Aha! Dirk Hammerhand! So you thought to knock a hole in my skull, as you have done to many a better man than yourself? He must be a luckier man than you, who catches Hereward the Wake asleep. I shall give your love to the Enchanted Prince, my faithful serving man, whom they call Martin Lightfoot.'

Dirk cursed the day he was born. Instead of the mare and foal, he had got the two wretched horses which the stranger had left, and a face which hurt so much that he never again offered to exchange blows with a stranger.

So Hereward kept his vow and, by the help of his clever servant, Martin Lightfoot, and his own cunning, won

mare Swallow, with no weapon but his fist and wearing no armour but his shirt.

CHAPTER 8

How Hereward rode into Bruges like a Beggar-man

THE spring and summer had passed, and the autumn was almost over, when Robert le Frison and his army came back to Bruges, having subdued the Hollanders, at any rate for the present. And Torfrida went out with the great Marquis and the Queen-Countess, and their lords and ladies, to meet the victors, and she looked eagerly for Hereward. But Hereward was not with them.

There was a great feast that day, of course ; and Torfrida was there : but she could not eat. Nevertheless she was too proud to let the knights know what was in her heart ; so she chatted and laughed as gaily as the rest, watching always for a word about Hereward. But none mentioned his name.

The feast was long ; the ladies did not leave the table till nearly bed-time ; and then the men drank on.

The ladies went up to the Queen-Countess's bedroom, where the solemn undressing of that royal lady usually took place.

It was Torfrida's turn to take off the royal shoes ; and she was advancing to do her duty, when the Queen-Countess said, sternly,

'Stop there !'

Torfrida stopped, very much frightened.

'Ladies,' said the Queen-Countess, 'there are in the South of France what are called Courts of Love, at which all who offend against the laws of love are tried by their equals, and punished as they deserve.'

Torfrida turned red.

'It is time,' said the royal lady, 'that we should hold a

Court of Love to try this girl. I hear, fair maid, that you were old enough to be married four years ago.'

Torfrida stood like a stone, being frightened out of her wits.

'Why are you not married?' said her royal mistress, sternly.

There was, of course, no answer.

'I hear,' she went on, 'that him to whom you gave your love, you drove out into the cold, telling him to go and fight in his shirt, if he wished to win your love.'

'I did not,' Torfrida at last answered; 'he angered me—he——' and Torfrida found herself in the act of accusing Hereward.

She stopped instantly.

'She has confessed,' said the Queen-Countess. 'What punishment, ladies, does she deserve? What punishment would the ladies of the South inflict, if we sent her to be judged by their Courts of Love?'

One lady said one thing, one another. Some spoke cruelly, for they were glad to see a girl so much more beautiful than they in trouble.

At last the Queen-Countess stopped the discussion.

'This is my decision,' she said. 'We will marry her to the first man who enters the castle to-night, whoever he may be.'

Torfrida looked at her mistress to see if she were mad. But the Queen-Countess was grave and sane. Then Torfrida's anger broke out.

'You *dare* do this?' she said, slowly, with eyes so fierce that even the Queen-Countess Adela was for a moment afraid.

There was a noise of shouting and laughing in the court below, which made all turn and listen.

The next moment a serving-man came in, puzzled, and inclined to laugh.

'May it please your Highness, here is the strangest



'HERWARD IT WAS, AND SHE LAY UPON HIS NECK'

adventure. There is ridden into the castle-yard a beggarman with scarce a shirt to his back, on a great ugly mare with a foal running by her ; and a fool behind him carrying lance and shield. And he says that he is come to fight any knight of the Court, ragged as he stands, for the fairest lady in the Court, be she who she may, if she have not a wedded husband already.'

'And what says my Lord Marquis ?'

'That it is a fair challenge and a good adventure ; and that fight he shall, if any man will answer his challenge.'

'And I say, tell my Lord Marquis that fight he shall not : for he shall have the fairest maiden in this Court for the trouble of carrying her away ; and that I, Adela of France, will give her to him. So let that beggar dismount, and be brought up hither to me.'

There was silence again. Torfrida looked round her once more to see whether or not she was dreaming, and whether there was one human being to whom she could appeal. Her mother sat praying and weeping in a corner. Torfrida looked at her with one glance of scorn, and then turned to face her fate with the fierce courage of her ancestors.

Married to a beggar ! It was a strange accident ; and an ugly one ; and a great cruelty and wrong. But it was not impossible, hardly improbable, in days when the caprice of the strong created accidents, and when cruelty and wrong went for nothing, even with very kindly honest folk. So Torfrida faced the danger, as she would have faced that of a kicking horse or a flooded ford ; she pulled out a little sharp knife, and considered that the beggarman could wear no armour, and that she wore none either. For if she succeeded in slaying that beggarman, she might need to slay herself, after, to avoid being—according to the fashion of those days—burnt alive.

So when the curtain was drawn back, and that beggarman came into the room, instead of shrieking, fainting, hiding,

or turning, she made three steps straight toward him, looking him in the face like a wild cat at bay. Then she threw up her arms; and fell upon his neck.

It was Hereward himself. Filthy, ragged: but Hereward.

His shirt was brown with blood, and torn with wounds; and through its rents showed more than one hardly healed scar. His hair and beard were all matted with blood and dirt; and one heavy cut across the head had cut not only hair, but skull, very close.

But Hereward it was; and regardless of all beholders, she lay upon his neck, and never stirred nor spoke.

'I call you to witness, ladies,' cried the Queen-Countess, 'that I am guiltless. She has given herself to this beggarman of her own free will. What say you?' And she turned to Torfrida's mother.

Torfrida's mother only prayed and wept.

'Countesses and Ladies,' said the Queen-Countess. 'There will be two weddings to-morrow. The first will be that of my son Robert and my pretty Lady Gertrude here. The second will be that of my pretty Torfrida and Hereward.'

'And the second bride,' said the Countess Gertrude, rising and taking Torfrida in her arms, 'will be ten times prettier than the first. There, sir,' turning to Hereward, 'I have done all you asked of me. Now go and wash yourself.'

CHAPTER 9

How Hereward had News from England

So Hereward and Torfrida were married; and, as Hereward had rest for a time from fighting, they passed the remainder of the winter together joyously in St. Omer. They lived in Torfrida's home; and as they were both

rich in this world's goods, they kept house in grand style. Hereward kept forty gallant housecarles, or men-at-arms, in his hall all the winter, and Torfrida and her women made and mended all their clothes. He gave great alms at his door to all the poor; and especially befriended all shipwrecked and needy sailors.

He was so happy that, for the first time in his life, he was unwilling to go to war. But the Hollanders had rebelled again, and as he was Robert le Frison's man, he had to follow him, when the spring came, in another campaign against the rebels: and for eight or nine weary months Torfrida was alone.

At last the short November days came round; and a joyful woman was Torfrida when one day the streets of St. Omer resounded to the tramp of armed men, and Hereward and his men-at-arms marched into the courtyard. While the men were taking off their armour, she and Hereward went into the house together, and were so happy that a year's parting was forgotten in a minute's meeting.

'Now!' cried she, half triumphantly, half tenderly, 'look there!'

'What?' cried Hereward. 'A cradle? A baby?'

'Your baby-girl.'

'A daughter?' he said, as he stooped and kissed the little one. 'If she is half as beautiful as her mother, what fighting there will be about her! How jolly it will be to see the knights hewing at each other, while our daughter sits in state at the tournament as the Queen of Love and Beauty.'

Then they talked long together, as young fathers and mothers will, of their child, and their happiness and their home. At last Torfrida said:

'Now, my joy, my life, my hero, my knight, I have great news for you, as well as a little baby—news from England.'

And he listened while she told him all the great things that had been happening in England while he had been fighting in Holland. The King, Edward the Confessor, was dead; and as Edgar the Atheling, the only member of the royal house left, was but a boy, Harold, son of Earl Godwin, had been elected king. And William, Duke of Normandy, had laid claim to the English throne, and had sworn to drive Harold out as a usurper, and was making mighty preparations to invade England. Torfrida also had two letters for him—one from Harold and one from William, each asking Hereward to join him. To the first Hereward sent this reply—‘Hereward, the son of Leofric, is Harold’s equal and not his man.’ To the second, he wrote—‘On the day that William is king of all England Hereward will come in and be his man.’ William received that message in Rouen, in Normandy. When he read it he laughed and said to his knights:

‘It is a fair challenge from a brave man. The day shall come when I will claim it.’

As the weeks passed on Hereward was troubled by the bad news that now began to come thick and fast from his own land. For England was now threatened with two invasions at the same time—one from the south, the other from the north. Duke William’s great army was ready and was only waiting a favourable wind to cross the English Channel and attack England from the south; and Harold Hardraade, King of Norway, the famous Viking, along with Tostig, King Harold’s brother, were attacking England in the north and making their way to York, where Morcar, Hereward’s nephew, was preparing to resist them.

Hereward’s heart was black within him to see these mighty events passing, as it were, within his reach, and yet be unable to take his share in them. For what side could he take? That of Tostig, son of Godwin, against his own nephews Edwin and Morcar? That of Harold, son of

Godwin, the usurper ? That of William of Normandy, the foreigner, against his own country ? Oh ! if only he had been in England in the position he would have occupied if he had not been outlawed by his own folly—a position of great power : perhaps a great earl in command of all the armies of Northern England. And he bitterly cursed his youthful sins and follies, as he rode to and fro almost daily to the sea-port, asking for news, and getting often too much.

One day, when he was down at the port, a ship came in, and a man landed and stood on the shore, calling in an unknown tongue to the bystanders, who laughed at him.

‘ Out of the way—villains ! ’ said Hereward, striding up. ‘ Why, man, you are a Norseman ! ’

‘ Norseman I am,’ said the stranger. ‘ Thord Gunlaugsson is my name, and I bring bad news for Earl Tostig’s wife.’

‘ What ? is he dead ? ’

‘ Yes : and Harold Hardraade as well.’ Hereward stood silent, horrified. For Tostig he cared nothing ; but that Harold Hardraade, Harold the Viking, the one man whom he had taken for his pattern and ideal, the one man under whose banner he would have been proud to fight—that *he* was dead, made all the earth seem empty.

Then he questioned the stranger, eagerly : and Thord told the story of the battle of Stamford Bridge, in which he himself had fought as one of Hardraade’s men. They had defeated and beaten back Earl Morcar, and got to Stamford Bridge ; but then King Harold, who had marched up rapidly from the south, fell upon them and totally defeated them.

Hereward took the man back with him to St. Omer ; and when they reached his house told Martin Lightfoot to see to his comfort.

‘ That I will,’ said Martin, ‘ as the apple of my eye.’

As Martin led the stranger away to his room he said :

‘ Are you Thord Gunlaugsson of Waterford in Ireland ? ’

'That I am,' said the stranger. 'How do you know me, man?'

'I am of Waterford, too. You had a slave girl once, I think, called Mew.'

'What is that to you?' roared Thord, turning on him furiously.

'I meant no harm,' said Martin. 'I saw her at Waterford when I was a boy, and thought she was a pretty girl, that is all.'

Meanwhile Hereward went into Torfrida's room. And from her he learnt another great piece of news. Three days after the battle of Stamford Bridge, while Harold was still in York, Duke William and his Normans landed at Pevensey on the south coast. Harold marched rapidly south to meet him, and, though deserted by Edwin and Morcar, gave battle to the Normans near Hastings; and there had been defeated, and he and his chief nobles slain. As Torfrida described the fight, and the courage of Harold and his brothers in the last struggle round the standard, Hereward's eyes were filled with noble tears; and, though Harold was his hated rival, he sprang up and cried:

'Honour to the sons of Godwin! Honour to the southern men! Honour to all true English hearts! Why was I not there, to fight and die with them?'

Torfrida caught him round the neck. 'Because,' she cried, 'you are here, my hero, to free your country from its tyrants. These tears of yours are more precious to Torfrida than the spoils of a hundred fights; for they tell me that Hereward still loves his country, still honours valour, even in a foe.'

That night, before Hereward went to bed, he called Martin Lightfoot.

'Where is that Norseman, Martin?' he asked. 'I want to hear more of how poor Hardraade fell.'

'You can't speak to him now, master. He has been sound asleep for two hours; and warm enough, I guess.'

Begin 'Where ?'

In the great green bed with blue curtains, just above the kitchen.'

'What nonsense is this ? What do you mean ?'

'The green bed is the earth ; the blue curtains, the sky ; and the kitchen is hell, where all wicked men go.'

Hereward looked at Martin. Madness glared in his eyes.

'You have killed him ?'

'Yes, and buried him too.'

'Traitor !' cried Hereward, seizing him.

'Take your hands off my throat, master. He was only my father.'

Hereward stood shocked and puzzled. But Thord Gunlaugsson was, after all, No-man's man, and would never be missed ; and Martin Lightfoot, apart from his madness, was his own right-hand man all day long.

So all he said was :

'I hope you have buried him well and safely ?'

'You may walk your bloodhound over his grave to-morrow, without finding him.'

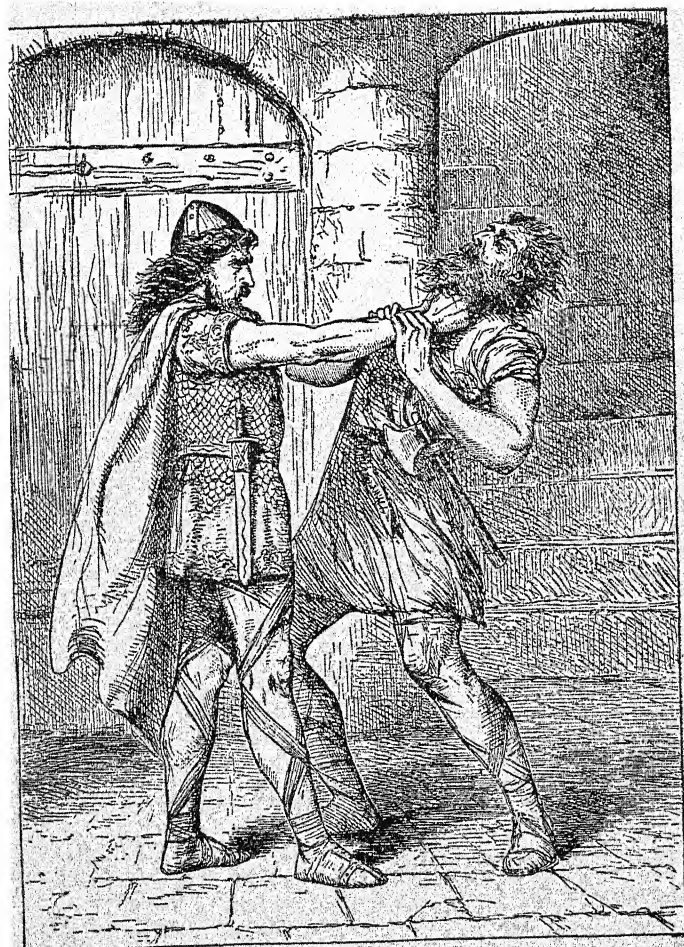
And where he was buried Hereward never knew. But from that night Martin got a trick of stroking and patting his little axe, and talking to it as if it had been alive.

In those days Hereward went into Bruges, to Marquis Baldwin, about his business. And as he walked in Bruges street he met an old friend, Gilbert of Ghent.

He had grown somewhat stouter, and somewhat greyer, in the last ten years : but he was as hearty as ever, and as honest, according to his own notions of honesty.

He shook Hereward by both hands, clapt him on the back, swore with many oaths that he had heard of his fame in all lands, that he always said that he would turn out a champion, and a gallant knight, and had said it long before he killed the bear.

Hereward soon found out that Gilbert, who always favoured the winning side, was on his way to join William



"' TRAITOR ! ' " CRIED HEREWARD, SEIZING HIM '

of Normandy, shrewdly thinking thereby to renew his fortune. Hereward asked after Alfruda, the little girl he had rescued from the great white bear years ago, and was told she had grown into a very beautiful woman, and heiress to great estates in Northumbria. Much against Gilbert's will, she was betrothed to Dolfin, the son of Gospatric, who was cousin of Malcolm, King of Scotland, and who claimed to be Earl of Northumbria. Gilbert wanted to keep this rich and beautiful heiress in his own care; and even tried to persuade Hereward to pick a quarrel with Dolfin and kill him, and marry Alfruda himself, at which Hereward laughed loud and long, and said he was too fond of his own wife to want to part with her.

That day he saw Alfruda in Baldwin's hall. He was talking to young Dolfin, a tall and handsome young Scotchman. Presently the ladies entered from the room adjoining the hall. A buzz of expectation rose from all the knights, and Alfruda's name was whispered round.

She came in. So beautiful a damsel he had never beheld; and as she swept down toward him, he for one moment forgot Torfrida, and stood spell-bound like the rest.

Her eye caught his. If his face showed recognition, hers showed none. The remembrance of their early friendship, of her deliverance from the monster, had plainly passed away.

'Fickle, ungrateful things, these women,' thought Hereward.

She passed him close. As she did so she turned her head, and looked him full in the face one moment, haughty and cold.

'So you could not wait for me?' said she, in a quiet whisper, and went on straight to Dolfin, who stood trembling with expectation and delight.

She put her hand into his.

'Here stands my champion,' said she.

'Say, here kneels your slave,' cried the Scot, dropping on to one knee.

Alfruda turned her head away half contemptuously; and as she did so, she let her hand drop listlessly from Dolfin's grasp, and drew back to the other ladies.

A suspicion crossed Hereward's mind. Did she really love the Prince? Did those strange words of hers mean that she had not yet forgotten Hereward himself?

However, he said to himself that it was no concern of his, as it certainly was not: went home to Torfrida; told her everything that had happened; laughed over it with her; and then forgot Alfruda, Dolfin, and Gilbert.

It was some time after this that the coming of the Countess Gyda, mother of Harold and widow of Earl Godwin, to St. Omer, finally settled Hereward's doubts, and sent him to England to begin his great struggle against Duke William. William had by no means conquered all England when he won the Battle of Hastings; and it took him several years of hard fighting to subdue the whole country. Gyda and Harold's sons had organized a rising in the west, where the family was still powerful; and it was only when William took Exeter that she fled and took refuge in St. Omer.

Although she belonged to the rival family of Godwin, Gyda was hospitably entertained by Hereward and Torfrida. She was a clever schemer and a strong-willed old woman; and she at once began plotting again against Duke William.

'What are you doing here?' she said sharply to Hereward, soon after her arrival. 'Do you not know that the lands of your nephews, Edwin and Morcar, have been given to low-born Norman adventurers?'

'So much the worse for them,' said Hereward, scornfully.

'Sir?'

'You forget, lady, that I am an outlaw, and cannot feel much affection for my family.'

'But do you not know that your mother's lands are seized likewise?'

Hereward made no answer, but played with his dagger.

'And do you not know that England is ready to burst into a blaze, if there be one man wise enough to light the match in the right place? That Sweyn of Denmark, my nephew, or Asbiorn, his brother, will surely land in England this year with a mighty host? And that if there be one man in England of wit enough, and knowledge enough of war, to lead the armies of England, the Normans may be driven into the sea, and Sweyn of Denmark, a fine Danish king, sit on the throne of England?'

Hereward said nothing: but he listened, and still played with his dagger.

'You,' Gyda continued, 'are above all men the man who is needed.' And she began praising Hereward's valour, his fame, his eloquence, his skill as a general; and when he suggested, smiling, that he was an exile and an outlaw, she insisted that he was all the fitter from that very fact. He had no enemies among the nobles. He had been mixed up in none of the civil wars and blood feuds of the last fifteen years. He was known only as that which he was, the ablest English captain of his day—the only man who could cope with William, the only man whom all parties in England would alike obey.

And so, with flattery as well as with truth, she persuaded, if not Hereward, at least Torfrida, that he was the man destined to free England once more; and that an earldom—or anything which he chose to ask—would be the sure reward of his assistance.

'Torfrida,' said Hereward that night, 'kiss me well; for you will not kiss me again for awhile.'

'What?'

'I am going to England to-morrow.'

'Alone?'

'Alone. I and Martin to spy out the land; and a dozen or so of housecarles to take care of the ship in harbour.'

'Hereward, Hereward, the Normans will kill you!'

'Not while I have your armour on. Peace, little fool! Are you actually afraid for Hereward at last?'

'Oh heavens! when am I not afraid?' and she cried herself to sleep on his breast. But she knew that for him to go was the right and knightly and manly thing to do.

Two days after, a long ship ran out of the river mouth, and sailed away north. Hereward had begun his great struggle with William of Normandy.

CHAPTER 10

How Hereward cleared Bourne of Frenchmen and was made a Knight

A WEEK after, Hereward came riding towards his native town of Bourne, with Martin Lightfoot running at his heels. On the way he had learnt that all the lands of his family in that part of the country had been given by King William to one Ivo Taillebois, and to his old friend, Gilbert of Ghent, as a reward for their support; and that Gilbert had given Bourne to one of his own men, who, with some twenty-five French followers, was then in possession of the town.

When he reached Bourne it was dark. He rode slowly into the long street to his ancient home. He could see the great hall, its narrow windows all lit up. With an angry growl he turned back, trying to remember a house where he could safely lodge. Martin pointed one out.

'Old Viking Surturbrand, the housecarle, did live there; and maybe lives there still.'

'We will try;' and Martin knocked at the door.

The narrow window was opened, but not the door; and through the window a surly voice asked who was there.

‘Who lives here?’

‘Pery, son of Surturbrand. Who are you who ask?’

‘An honest gentleman and his servant, looking for a night’s lodging.’

‘This is no place for honest folk.’

‘Lodging we will pay for, freely and well.’

‘We want none of your money:’ and the window was shut.

Martin pulled out his axe, and broke the window.

‘What are you doing? We shall rouse the town,’ said Hereward.

‘Let be: these are no French, but honest English, who like one all the better for a little rough play.’

‘What did you do that for?’ asked the surly voice again. ‘If it were not for those rascal Frenchmen up above, I would come out and split your skull for you.’

‘If there are Frenchmen up above,’ said Martin, in a voice of pretended terror, ‘take us in for the love of God, or we shall be murdered before morning.’

‘You do not need to stay in the town, man, unless you like.’

Hereward rode close to the window, and said in a low voice, ‘I am a nobleman of Flanders, good sir, and a sworn foe to all French. My horse is weary, and cannot make a step forward; and if you are a Christian man, you will take me in and let me go off in the morning.’

‘From Flanders?’ And the man turned and seemed to consult those within. At length the door was slowly opened, and Pery appeared, his double axe over his shoulder.

‘If you are from Flanders, come in in God’s name: but be quick, before those Frenchmen hear you.’

Hereward went in. Five or six men were standing round the long table, upon which they had just laid down their

double axes and spears. More than one countenance Hereward recognized at once. Over the fire sat a very old man, his hands upon his knees, as he warmed his bare feet. He started up at the noise, and Hereward saw at once that it was old Surturbrand, and that he was blind.

'Who is it? Is Hereward come?' asked he, with the dull dreamy voice of age.

'Not Hereward, father,' said some one, 'but a knight from Flanders.'

The old man dropped his head upon his breast again, while Hereward's heart beat high at hearing his own name. At all events he was among friends; and approaching the table he unbuckled his sword and laid it down among the other weapons. 'At least,' said he, 'I shall have no need of it as long as I am here among honest men.'

'You seem to be all besieged here,' he added. 'How is this?'

His hosts eyed him, not without some lingering suspicion, but still with admiration and respect. His splendid armour and weapons, as well as the golden locks which fell far below his shoulders, and conveniently hid a face which he did not wish yet to have recognized, showed him to be a man of the highest rank; while the palm of his small hand, as hard and bony as any woodman's, proclaimed him to be no novice of a fighting man. The strong Flemish accent which both he and Martin Lightfoot had assumed prevented the honest Englishmen from piercing his disguise. They watched him, while he in turn watched them, struck by their uneasy looks and sullen silence.

'Are you such a stranger,' asked Pery, 'that you do not know what has happened in this town during the last three days? What has happened makes a free Englishman's blood boil to tell of. Here, Sir Knight, three days ago, comes this Frenchman with some twenty of his ruffians; says that this new French king has given away

all Earl Morcar's lands, and that Bourne is his ; kills a man or two, insults the women, and gets drunk ; breaks into my Lady Godiva's room, telling her to give up her keys and her jewels. She faces the rascals like a princess ; and the boy Godwin, her youngest son—our hope, the last of the family—draws his sword, and kills two of them. The rest attack him and cut off his head, and there it sticks on the top of the roof of the hall to this hour.'

Hereward was startled by a burst of noise outside—music, laughter, and shouts.

'There,' said Pery bitterly, 'are those Normans, dancing and singing in the hall, with my Lord Godwin's head above them!' And curses bitter and deep went round the room.

Once again the old man wailed out of the chimney-corner: 'Why did they ever send Hereward away? I warned the good Earl, I warned my good lady, many a time, that they might need him some day when they could not find him. He was a marvellous lad!' And again he whined, and sank into silence.

Hereward heard all this dry-eyed, hardening his heart into a great resolve.

'This is a dark story,' said he calmly, 'and it would be right for me as a gentleman to succour this distressed lady, if I but knew how. Tell me what I can do now, and I will do it.'

'Your health!' cried one. 'You speak like a true knight.'

'And he looks the man to keep his word, I'll warrant him,' spoke another.

'He does,' said Pery, shaking his head. 'But what can be done? There are not ten men-at-arms in Bourne this night; and what is worse, sir, there is no man to lead them.'

'And who,' said Hereward, 'is this Hereward of whom you speak?'

'Surely you know him, if you come from Flanders, Sir Knight,' cried three or four voices.

'If you mean Hereward the Wake, Hereward the outlaw, of course I know him: but what has he to do with this town?'

Half-a-dozen voices told him at once his own story.

'I always had heard,' he said, smiling, 'that that gentleman came of a noble family; and when I return to Flanders I will tell him of all that has happened here.'

At last the men grew sleepy, and lay down on the floor of the room, each with his weapon at his side. But Hereward beckoned Pery and Martin Lightfoot, and went out at the back of the house under the pretence of seeing to his horse.

'Pery, son of Surturbrand,' he said, 'I have made up my mind to go up with my servant to yonder hall to see what these Norman-French are doing. If I do not come back, keep my horse, and give this purse and this ring to your lady, and tell her that she will find a home and friends at St. Omer till these evil times are over.'

As Hereward had spoken with some feeling, he had unconsciously dropped his Flemish accent and spoken in the Lincolnshire dialect; and so Pery stared at him closely, and suddenly cried out:

'Either you are Hereward, or his double! You speak like Hereward, you look just what Hereward would be now. You are, my lord, whom men call Wake!'

'Pery, if you know me, tell no one, except my mother. If I come back to you before morning, you will know there is not a Frenchman left alive in the Hall of Bourne.' Pery threw his arms round him, and embraced him silently. Then, as one astonished, he let them in silence out of the gate. In a few minutes Hereward and Martin reached the hall. No one was about. The serfs were all biding in their huts, listening in fear to the revelry of their new tyrants. The night was dark; but as he looked up,

Hereward could see between him and the sky his brother's head sticking up on the roof.

'That I must get down,' said he in a low voice.

'Here is a ladder,' said Martin, stumbling over something. 'The drunken villains must have left it here.'

Hereward raised the ladder, took down the head, kissed the cold forehead, and wrapped it in his cloak.

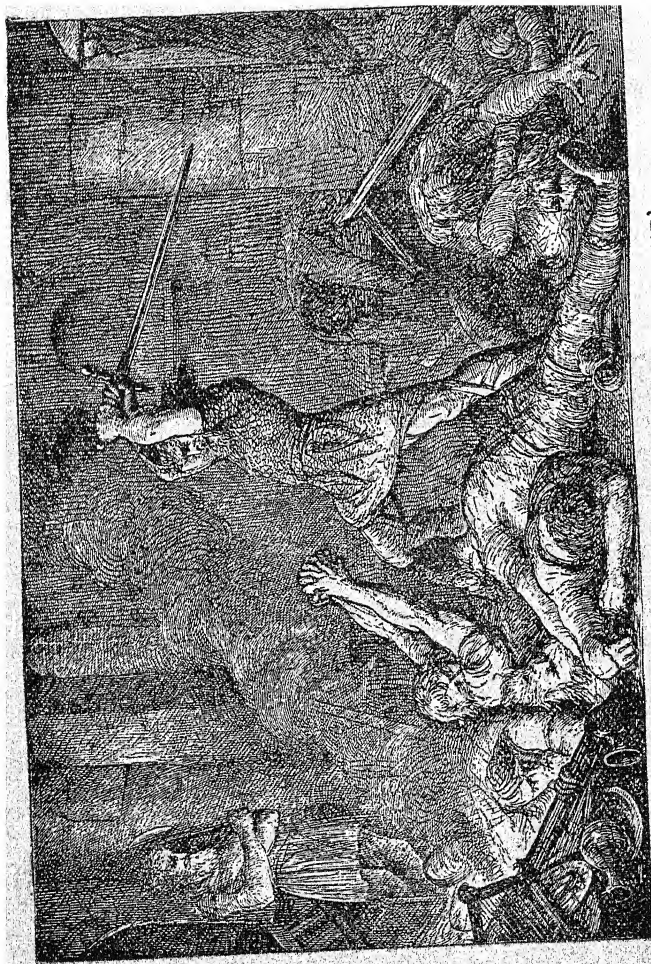
Then he slipped round to one of the narrow windows and looked in. The hall was in a wasteful blaze of light; a whole month's candles burning in one night. The table was covered with all his father's choicest gold and silver dishes; the wine was running waste upon the floor; the men were sitting and lying at the table in every stage of drunkenness; the loose women, camp-followers, and suchlike, were almost as drunk as their masters; and at the table-head, most drunk of all, sat, in Earl Leofric's seat, the new Lord of Bourne.

Hereward could scarcely believe his eyes. He was none other than Gilbert of Ghent's stout Flemish cook, whom he had seen many a time in Scotland. Hereward turned from the window in disgust, and slipped down to where Martin stood below, and led him round the house.

'Now then, down with the ladder quick, and dash in the door. I go in: stay you outside. If any man passes me, see that he does not pass you.'

Martin laughed as he helped the ladder down. In another moment the door was burst in, and Hereward stood upon the threshold. He gave one war-shout of 'A Wake! A Wake!' and then rushed forward.

And then began a murder grim and great. They fought with ale-cups, with knives, with benches; but, drunken and unarmed, they were hewn down like sheep. Fifteen Normans were in the hall when Hereward burst in. When the sun rose there were fifteen heads upon the roof. Escape had been impossible. Martin had laid the ladder across the door; and the few who escaped the master's



‘AND THEN BEGAN A MURDER GRIM AND GREAT’

terrible sword stumbled over it, to be brained by the man's not less terrible axe.

Then Hereward took up his brother's head, and went in to his mother.

The women in her chamber opened to him. They had seen all that passed from the gallery above, which, as usual, hidden by a curtain, enabled the women to watch unseen what passed in the hall below.

The Lady Godiva sat upon a low stool beside a long dark thing covered with a cloth. So utterly crushed was she that she did not even lift up her head as Hereward entered.

He placed his ghastly burden reverently beneath the cloth, and then went and knelt before his mother.

For a while neither spoke a word. Then the Lady Godiva suddenly drew back her hood, and dropping on her knees, threw her arms round Hereward's neck, and wept till she could weep no more.

'Blessed strong arms,' sobbed she at last, 'around me !
{To feel something left in the world to protect me; something left in the world which loves me.'

'You forgive me, mother ?'

'You forgive me ? It was I, I who was in fault—I, who should have cherished you, my strongest, my bravest, my noblest—now my all.'

'No, it was all my fault ; and on my head is all this misery. If I had been here, as I ought to have been, all this might have never happened.'

'You would only have been murdered too. No : thank God you were away ; or God would have taken you with the rest. God has forsaken me !'

'Nay, never say God has deserted you. See, He has sent me to you !' said Hereward, wondering to find himself, of all men on earth, preaching consolation.

'Yes, I have you ! Hold me. Love me. Let me feel that one thing loves me on earth !'

'Mother, I must put you in a place of safety. I will take you to Peterborough Abbey, where my uncle Brand is.'

'No, not to Peterborough,' cried Lady Godiva. 'Your uncle Brand is abbot there now; but he is dying—dying of a broken heart, like me. And when he dies one Thorold, a Frenchman, will be abbot in his place. Besides, your old foe Herluin is the prior now. No, take me where I shall never see a French face. Take me to Crowland Abbey—where I shall see only English faces, and hear English voices, and die a free Englishwoman under the protection of St. Guthlac.'

'Very good,' said Hereward. 'So now prepare, and gather all your treasures. We will start for Crowland to-morrow afternoon.'

A wild night was that in Bourne. All the folk, free and unfree, man and woman, were out on the streets, asking the meaning of those terrible shrieks, followed by a more terrible silence.

At last Hereward strode down from the hall, his drawn sword in his hand.

'Silence, good folks, and hearken to me, once and for all. There is not a Frenchman left alive in Bourne. If you be the men I take you for, there shall not be one left alive in all this district. Silence, again!'—as a fierce cry of rage and joy arose, and men rushed forward to take him by the hand, women to embrace him. 'This is no time for compliments, good folks, but for quick wits and quick blows. I have lit the fire: dare you blow it till all is in a blaze from south to north? I have fought a dozen Normans. Dare you fight Gilbert of Ghent, and Ivo Taillebois, with William, Duke of Normandy, at their back? Or will you take me, here as I stand, and give me up to them as an outlaw and a robber—the murderer of Gilbert's cook—your late lord and master?'

'Lord and master?' roared the men. 'We are free

men. *You shall be our lord. We will follow, if you will lead.*

'Hereward is come home!' cried a feeble voice behind. 'Let me come to him. Let me feel him.'

And through the crowd, supported by two ladies, tottered the mighty form of Surturbrand, the blind Viking.

'Hereward is come,' cried he, as he folded his master's son in his arms. *'Ahoi! he is wet with blood! Ahoi! he smells of blood! Ahoi! the ravens will grow fat now, for Hereward is come home!'*

Some would have led the old man away: but he thrust them off fiercely.

'Ahoi! come wolf! Ahoi! come kite! Ahoi! come eagle from off the fen! You followed us, and we fed you well, when Swend Forkbeard brought us over the sea. Follow us now, and we will feed you better still, with the Frenchmen who would rob their nearest kinsman of land and lass. Ahoi! Swend's men! Ahoi! Canute's men! Vikings' sons! Split up the war-arrow, and send it round: and may my curse be on every man who will not pass it on!'

All men were silent as the old Viking's voice, cracked and feeble when he began, gathered strength from rage, till it rang through the still night air like a trumpet blast.

Hereward saw his opportunity, and seized it, crying:

'The Viking is right! So speaks the spirit of our fathers; and we must show ourselves their true sons. Send round the war-arrow, and death to the man who does not pass it on! Better die bravely together than falter and part company, to be hunted down one by one by men who will never forgive us as long as we have an acre of land for them to seize.'

Before morning the war-arrow was split into four splinters, and carried out east, west, south and north, through all Kesteven. If the splinter were put into the house-father's hand, he must send it on at once to the

next freeman's house. This was the signal for war, and the summons to all men to assemble for battle. All through the country-side that night went the arrow-splinters, and with them the whisper, 'Hereward the Wake has come again : ' till, before mid-day, there were fifty well-armed men in the old camping-field outside the town, and Hereward speaking to them in words of fire. Among them were some of the companions of his boyhood, naughty young housecarles of his old following, now settled down into honest thriving farmers, hard working and hard fighting, who had heard again and again, with pride, of his brave doings over the sea. There were Winter and Gwenoch, and Geri, and many others. And they, and all, responded to Hereward's appeals with enthusiastic zeal.

A chill came over them, nevertheless, when he told them he must go back at once to Flanders, for he had promised his good lord and sovereign, Baldwin of Flanders, that he would return, and his word of honour he must keep. 'But,' he cried, 'I will return within the year, with ships and men, and perhaps King Sweyn of Denmark. Hold your own till I and the Danes come, and all will be well. So will you show yourselves to be free Englishmen, able to hold England against Frenchmen and all strangers.'

Then they went down to the water, and laid the boy Godwin's corpse in a boat : and Lady Godiva and Hereward sat at the dead lad's head ; and Winter steered the boat, and Gwenoch and others rowed. And they rowed through the fens away to Crowland, by lake and stream ; and at last came to the old abbey—a vast range of wooden buildings—and went into the great courtyard.

And Lady Godiva called for old Abbot Ulfketyl, the good and brave, and fell upon his neck, and told him all her tale ; and Ulfketyl wept upon her neck, for they were old and faithful friends.

And there in the Abbey Church they buried the lad Godwin, and when the funeral was done Hereward went up to the high altar, and bade Winter and Gwenoch come with him. And there he knelt, and vowed a vow to God and St. Guthlac, and the Lady Torfrida, his true love, never to leave off slaying while there was a Frenchman left alive on English ground.

And Godiva and Ulfketyl heard his vow, and shuddered: but they dared not stop him, for they too had English hearts.

And Winter and Gwenoch heard it, and repeated it word for word.

Then he kissed his mother, and called Winter and Gwenoch, and went forth. He would be back again, he said, on the third day.

Then those three went to Peterborough, and asked for Abbot Brand. And the monks let them in; for the fame of their deed had passed through the forest, and all the French had fled.

And old Brand lay back in his great arm-chair, his legs all muffled up in furs, for he could get no heat; and by him stood Herluin the prior, and wondered when he would die, and Thorold take his place, and bring in French customs in all things, and rule the English boors with a rod of iron.

But when old Brand saw Hereward come in, he cast the mufflers off him, and sprang up from his chair, and was young and strong in a moment, and for a moment.

And he threw his arms round Hereward, and wept upon his neck, as his mother had done. And Hereward wept upon his neck, though he had not wept upon his mother's.

Then Brand held him at arms' length, or thought he held him; for he was leaning on Hereward, and tottering all the while; and praised him as the champion, the warrior, the stay of his house, the avenger of his kin, the

hero of whom he had always prophesied that his kin would need him, and that then he would not fail.

But Hereward answered him modestly and mildly :

'Speak not so to me and of me, Uncle Brand. I am a very foolish, vain, sinful man, who have come through great adventures, I know not how, to great and strange happiness ; and now again to great and strange sorrows ; and to an adventure greater and stranger than all that has befallen me from my youth up until now. Therefore make me not proud, Uncle Brand, but keep me modest and lowly, as befits all true knights and penitent sinners.'

Brand looked at him, astonished ; and then turned to Herluin.

'Did I not tell you, prior ? This is the lad whom you called graceless and a savage ; and see, since he has been in foreign lands, and seen the ways of knights, he talks as well as a Frenchman, and as piously as any monk.'

'The Lord Hereward,' said Herluin, 'has doubtless learned much from the manners of our nation which he would not have learned in England. I rejoice to see him returned so Christian and so courtly a knight.'

'The Lord Hereward, Prior Herluin, has learnt one thing in his travels—to know somewhat of men and the hearts of men, and to deal with them as they deserve of him. They tell me that one Thorold of Malmesbury desires this abbey.'

'I have so heard, my lord.'

'Then I command—I, Hereward, Lord of Bourne—that this abbey be held against him and all Frenchmen, in the name of Sweyn of Denmark, the true king of England, and of me. And he that admits a Frenchman therein, I will kill him. This I tell you ; and this I shall tell your monks before I go. And unless you obey the same, my dream will be fulfilled ; and you will see Goldenborough on fire, and yourselves burning in the midst thereof.'

‘Sweyn of Denmark? What words are these?’ cried Brand.

‘You will know within six months, uncle. And now you must do something for me and my comrades before we go.’

‘Well, boy?’

‘Make us knights.’

‘Knights, lad? I thought you had been a knight these twelve years.’

‘I might have been made a knight after the French fashion, many a year ago. But something kept me from it—perhaps pride. But now I see why I was kept from being knighted—till I had done a deed worthy of a true knight. Now I have avenged the wronged and succoured the oppressed, and have purified my soul from enmity against my own family, and can go out into the world a new man, with my mother’s blessing on my head. So now make us knights, Uncle Brand, this day.’

‘It shall be done,’ said the aged Brand. ‘This night you shall watch and pray in the church. To-morrow Wilton, the monk of Ely, shall make you knights.’

That night Hereward and his companions watched in St. Peter’s Church, and the next morning they knelt before the high altar while the monks prayed and sang. And when the worship was over, Wilton, the monk of Ely, came down from the high-altar and touched each man’s bare neck with his sword, and bade him take back his sword in the name of God and use it, like a true knight, for a terror and punishment to evil-doers and a defence for women and orphans, and the poor and the oppressed, and the monks, the servants of God. Then they rose, knights: each feeling himself a better man.

It was late when they got back to Crowland. The good Abbot, Ulfketyl, received them with a troubled face, and the news that the French had vowed vengeance on Hereward, and that Sir Frederick, brother of the old Earl

Warrenne of Norfolk, had gathered men-at-arms at Lynn in Norfolk, and sworn to catch him and kill him.

'Very good,' said Hereward; 'I will visit him as I go home, Lord Abbot.'

A week after a boatman brought news to Crowland, how Sir Frederick was sitting in his inn at Lynn, when there came in one with a sword, and said, 'I am Hereward the Wake. I was told that you desired greatly to see me; therefore I am come, being a courteous knight,' and therewith smote off his head. And when the knights and others would have stopped him, he cut his way through them, killing some three or four at each stroke, himself unhurt; for he was clothed from head to foot in magic armour, and whosoever smote it, their swords melted in their hands. And so gaining the door, he vanished in a great cloud of sea-fowl, that cried for ever 'The Wake is come again.'

And after that the fen-men said to each other, that all the birds upon the lakes cried nothing save 'The Wake is come again.'

And so, already surrounded with mystery, Hereward flashed into the fens and out again, like the lightning, destroying as he passed. And the hearts of all the French were afraid; and the land had peace from its tyrants for many days.

CHAPTER 11

How Hereward sailed for England and gathered an Army

So Hereward came home to St. Omer, and took counsel with Torfrida and the clever old Countess Gyda. Their plan was to join forces with Sweyn, King of Denmark, and, when he landed on the east coast of England, to rouse the eastern and northern counties in his favour and proclaim him King of England. The men of the east and

north were of Danish blood ; and all England, they thought, would rather have a Dane for their king than a Frenchman, especially when that Dane was the nephew of the great Canute, who had been an English king.

But Sweyn was a very different man from Canute, and was slow to seize the chance. And Hereward waited impatiently, as the months went by, for the time of action. Meanwhile news came of another rising in the north of England, where Gospatric, who claimed to be Earl of Northumberland, and Waltheof proclaimed Edgar Atheling, the young prince who had been passed over when Harold was elected king. Hereward was angry when he heard this ; for he knew that Edgar Atheling could never lead all England to victory, and the proclamation might make Sweyn angry and unwilling to help. Then they heard that William had marched on York, defeated the rebels and plundered the town. And still Sweyn and his Danes had not sailed.

At last his time came. Martin Lightfoot ran in, breathless, to tell how the sails of a mighty fleet were visible from the shore.

So they went down the river by night, with Torfrida's mother, and the child, and all their jewels, and all they had in the world. And their housecarles went with them, forty men, tried and trained, who had vowed to follow Hereward round the world. And there were two longships ready, and twenty good sailors in each. So the Danes next morning were aware of two gallant ships bearing down on them, with a strange device embroidered on their sails.

A proud man was Hereward that day, as he sailed into the midst of the Danish fleet, and up to the royal ships, and shouted :

' I am Hereward the Wake ; and I come to take service under my rightful lord, Sweyn, King of England.'

' Come on board, then ; well do we know you, and right glad we are to have The Wake with us.'

And Hereward came on board.

'And you are Hereward?' asked a tall and noble warrior.

'I am. And you are Sweyn Ulfsson, the king?'

'I am Earl Asbiorn, his brother.'

'Then where is the king?'

'He is in Denmark, and I command his fleet; and with me Canute and Harold, Sweyn's sons, and earls and bishops enough for all England.'

This was spoken in a somewhat haughty tone, in answer to the look of surprise and disappointment on Hereward's face.

'What are your plans?' he replied. 'Whither goes Earl Asbiorn and his great following?'

'We purpose to try Dover,' said Asbiorn, haughtily.

'Then you are wrong,' said Hereward. 'You will not take it. Did I not send to you again and again, entreating you to go straight to the east coast, and send me word that I might come and raise the Fen-men for you, and then we would all go north together? If you try Dover you will be attacking the Frenchman at his strongest point, instead of his weakest. If you are wise, you will go straight to my part of the country, which is ready to receive you.'

Some of the Danish earls supported Hereward; but Asbiorn was proud and stubborn, and refused all advice. So Hereward went back to his ships, and bitterly complained to Torfrida.

'Sweyn,' he said, angrily, 'has sent Asbiorn instead of coming himself.'

'But why,' asked Torfrida, 'is that so terrible a mistake?'

'We do not want a fleet of Vikings in England, to plunder the French and English alike. We want a king, a king, a king!' and Hereward stamped with rage. 'And instead of a king, we have this Asbiorn—all men know him—greedy, and false, and weak-headed. Here he is going to

be beaten off at Dover ; and then, I suppose, at the next port ; and so forth, till the whole season is wasted, and the ships and men lost little by little. Pray for us to God and His saints, Torfrida, for we never needed it more.'

So Asbiorn went in ; tried to take Dover ; and was beaten off with heavy loss.

Then the Earls bade him take Hereward's advice. But he would not.

So he tried again at another part of the coast, and was beaten off again there, with more loss. Then, too late, he took Hereward's advice, and sailed north ; but only to commit more follies. For, instead of going on to Hereward's country and proclaiming King Sweyn and calling the Danish folk around him, he attacked Ipswich, plundering right and left. The men of Ipswich naturally enough rose and, like brave men, beat him off ; while Hereward, refusing to fight against his own countrymen, stayed in his ships, his heart within him black with disappointment, shame and rage.

At last they came to Yarmouth. Asbiorn would land there, and try Norwich.

Hereward was nearly desperate ; but he hit upon a plan. Let Asbiorn do so, if he would. He himself would sail round to the Wash, raise the Fen-men, and march eastward at their head through Norfolk to meet him. Asbiorn himself could not refuse so rational a proposal. All the earls and bishops approved loudly ; and away Hereward went, his heart almost broken, foreseeing nothing but evil.

And at every farm and town he blew the war-horn, and summoned every man who could bear arms to be ready for the coming of the Danish host from Norwich. And so through all the fens came true what the wild fowl said upon the lakes, that The Wake was come again.

And when he came to Bourne, all men were tilling in peace. The terror of The Wake had fallen on the Frenchmen ; and no man had dared to enter on his inheritance,

or to set a French foot over the threshold of that ghastly hall, above which still grinned the fifteen heads ; on the floor whereof still spread the dark stains of blood.

And the news went round through the Fens, and north into the Brunswald Forest, and away again to Lincoln and Sherwood, that The Wake was come again.

And Gilbert of Ghent, keeping Lincoln Castle for the Conqueror, was perplexed in mind, and looked well to gates and bars and sentinels ; for Hereward sent him at once a message that, as he had forgotten their old friendship and made his rascally cook lord of his mother's estates, he should be hanged on the highest tree in the Brunswald Forest.

And now brave men and true poured into Bourne from every side ; some great land-holders who had been dispossessed of their land ; some sons of holders who were not yet dispossessed ; some Morcar's men, some Edwin's, who had been turned out by the King. And with them came Hereward's old companions—Winter, and Geri, and Gwenoch, and Leofric the priest, and many more.

These valiant gentlemen, with the housecarles whom, more or fewer, they would bring with them, made up a formidable force, as after years proved well. But having got his men, Hereward's first care was to teach them that art of war, of which they knew nothing. The reckless spirit of personal independence, especially among the Anglo-Danes, prevented anything like discipline, or organized movement of masses ; and made every battle degenerate into a confusion of single combats.

But Hereward had learned that art of war which enabled the Normans to crush piecemeal with inferior numbers the vast but straggling armies of the English. His men, mostly outlaws and homeless, kept together by the pressure from without, and free from local jealousies, resembled an army of professional soldiers. And to the discipline which he instilled into them ; to his ability in marching and

placing troops; to his care for their food and for their transport; possibly also to his training them in that art of fighting on horseback in which the men of the south, if not the Anglo-Danes of the east, are said to have been quite unskilled,—in short, to all that he had learned under Robert le Frison, and among the highly civilized warriors of Flanders and Normandy, must be attributed the fact, that he and his little army defied for years the utmost efforts of the Frenchmen.

But Hereward grew anxious and more anxious, as days and weeks went on, and yet there was no news of Asbiorn and his Danes at Norwich. He was afraid that Earl Warrenne and Ralph de Guader were gathering their forces between him and the Danes. At last, when news came, it was the worst. The Danes had been utterly beaten at Norwich by Ralph de Guader and his Frenchmen, and had sailed away northward, no man knew whither.

Hereward, ready to weep with rage, went in to ask counsel of Torfrida. He had disappointed—deceived his men. He had promised that the Danes should come. How should he look them in the face?

‘Look them in the face?’ cried Torfrida. ‘Do that at once: now, without losing a moment. Call them together and tell them all. If their hearts are true, you may yet do great things without that traitor Asbiorn.’

‘Wise, wise wife,’ said Hereward, and went out and called his band together, and told them every word, and all that had passed since he had joined the Danish fleet.

‘And now I have deceived you, and entrapped you, and I have no right to be your captain more. He that will depart in peace, let him depart, before the Frenchmen close in on us on every side and swallow us up at one mouthful.’

Not a man answered.

‘I say it again: He that will depart, let him depart.’ They stood thoughtful.

Winter spoke at last.

'If all go, there are two men here who stay and fight by Hereward's side as long as there is a Frenchman left on English soil; for they have sworn an oath to Heaven and to St. Peter, and that oath will they keep. What say you, Gwenoch, knighted with us at Peterborough?'

Gwenoch stepped to Hereward's side.

'None shall go!' shouted a dozen voices. 'With Hereward we will live and die. Let him lead us to Lincoln, to Nottingham—where he will. We can save England for ourselves without the help of Danes.'

Then came Torfrida, like a queen, holding her little girl by the hand.

'Englishmen!' she cried. 'You are following a great captain, upon a great adventure. How great he is, you know as well as I. I have given him myself, my wealth, and all I have; and I have followed him I know not whither, because I trust him utterly. Men, trust him as I trust him, and follow him to the death.'

'That we will!' they answered with a great shout. And they crowded round her, and kissed her hands; and they bent down and kissed her little girl, and swore that she should be a daughter to each one of them, as long as they could hold their swords in their hands; and that they would follow Hereward and Torfrida till death.

CHAPTER 12

How Hereward formed the Camp of Refuge at Ely

DUKE WILLIAM was in the south, hunting, it is said, when in that year, 1069, the news was brought him that all the north and east of England had risen in rebellion, and he was king of only the south country. He was a great general, and as he studied his rough map of England

he quickly made up his mind what to do. He had to deal with five great dangers.

At Chester, one Eadric the wild Thane (or noble), whose lands the Normans had taken, with Edwin, the young earl, and the Welsh, had risen in rebellion.

Eastward, round Stafford and the centre of England, Morcar, Edwin's brother, led the revolt.

In the north, Waltheof, and Gospatric and the young Edgar Atheling with their host, had been joined by Asbiorn and the Danes, and had taken and burned York. The Danes especially troubled William; for Sweyn of Denmark claimed to be King of England as his right, and his fleet (the fourth great danger) was a mighty one.

Lastly, what was the meaning of this disturbance in the fens? What meant this news that Hereward of St. Omer was come again, and an army with him? That he was making war on all Frenchmen in the name of Sweyn, King of Denmark and of England? Perhaps William thought Hereward was only a desperate outlaw, little to be feared. But he found out, in after years, that he had mistaken his character and his power.

Duke William determined to cut the English line in two, and marched upon Stafford as its centre, and smote Morcar and his friends with a great destruction—the fugitives flying, some west to Chester, and some east to Hereward in the fens. When he marched on York no man opposed him. The Danes were gone down to the sea again, and the hearts of Gospatric and Waltheof failed them, and they retired before the great captain. Then William had his revenge. Far and wide the farms were burnt, and the growing crops; the horses were lamed and the cattle driven off; while of human death and misery there was no end. Yorkshire and much of the neighbouring counties lay waste for the next nine years. It did not recover itself fully till several generations after.

Then William turned south-west, and fell upon Edwin.

as he had fallen upon Morcar. He drove the Welsh back to their native hills, and laid waste with fire and sword for many a mile. He strengthened the walls of Chester; trampled out the last sparks of rebellion; and went south to Salisbury, King of England once more.

Why did he not push on at once against the one rebellion left alight, that of Hereward and his fen-men? It may be he meant to make terms with Sweyn; but it is more likely that he could do no more; that his army, after so swift and long a campaign, needed rest. Any way Hereward was left alone for the present. But it must have been a winter of bitter perplexity to him. He could get no news from Edwin; and news from York was almost as impossible to get, for Gilbert of Ghent in Lincoln stood between him and it.

He felt himself now pent in, all but trapped. Since he had set foot last in England ugly things had risen up, on which he had calculated too little, namely, Norman castles. A whole ring of them in Norfolk and Suffolk cut him off from the south. A castle at Cambridge closed the south end of the fens; another at Bedford, the western end; while Lincoln Castle to the north cut him off from York.

His men did not see the difficulty; and wanted him to march towards York. But he knew it was madness to march past these castles, and leave them threatening his rear. So there was nothing to be done but to complete their preparations for the struggle, keep up their strength, and wait for the Danes.

It must have been some time in December of the year 1070, that a handful of knights came through the Brunwald Forest, muddy and blood-stained, urging tired horses, as men desperate and exhausted. The foremost of them all, when he saw Hereward at the gate of Bourne, leaped down and threw his arms round his neck, and burst into bitter weeping.

'Hereward,' he cried, 'I know you, though you know me not; I am your nephew, Morcar; and all is lost.'

As the winter wore on other fugitives came in, mostly of rank and family. At last Edwin himself came, young and fair, like Morcar: he who should have been the Conqueror's son-in-law.

Then it was that Hereward formed the idea of the famous Camp of Refuge at Ely, and made it a formidable fact. Ely, which is about fifteen miles from Cambridge, was in those days an island in the fens, surrounded on all sides by a black abyss of bog and mud, a wilderness of lakes and streams, and thick jungles of reeds. The narrowest space between the firm mainland and the island was fully half a mile; and how to cross that half-mile no man knew. Only the local fen-men knew the dangerous winding paths through the reeds, and only they could cross the slow muddy streams and weedy lakes with leaping poles and in their rough little boats. Here, then, Hereward and his men, with the Earls Edwin and Morcar and many others of the old English nobility, came, and were welcomed by the Abbot Thurstan and his monks, all true-hearted Englishmen, to the Abbey of Ely. They made Ely a fortified camp, and prepared to make their last stand against the Conqueror.

Among those who joined Hereward at Ely was Bishop Egelwin of Durham. He brought the bad news that Gospatric and Waltheof had turned traitors and gone over to the King, who made them earls again. When Hereward heard this, and that moreover Waltheof was married to Judith, the Conqueror's niece, he smote his hands together, and cursed him.

'If his old father, Siward, could rise from the grave, he would split his cowardly skull,' he cried angrily. 'See what evil he has done to us! He is now Earl, not only of his lands, but of poor Morcar's too. He is Earl of Huntingdon, of Cambridge, they say—of this ground on which

we stand. What right have I here now ? How can I call on a single man to arm, as I could in Morcar's name ? I am an outlaw here, and a robber ; and so is every man with me. And do you think that William did not know that ? He saw well enough what he was doing when he set up that great brainless idol as earl again. He wanted to split up the Danish folk, and he has done it. The Northumbrians will stick to Waltheof. They think him a mighty hero, because he held York-gate alone with his own axe against all the French.'

'Well, that was a gallant deed.'

'Pish ! we are all gallant men, we English. It is not courage that we want, it is brains. So the Yorkshire men, and the Nottingham men too, will go with Waltheof. And round here, and all through the fens, every coward, every prudent man even—every man who likes to be within the law, and to feel his head safe on his shoulders—no blame to him—will draw off from me for fear of this new earl, and leave us to end as a handful of outlaws. I see it all. And William sees it all. He is wise enough, this Norman. Yes, Torfrida,' he went on after a pause, more gently, but in a tone of exquisite sadness, 'you are right, as you always are. I am no match for that man. I see it now.'

'I never said that. Only——'

'Only you told me again and again that he was the wisest man on earth.'

'And yet, for that very reason, I bade you win glory without end by defying the wisest man on earth.'

'And do you bid me do it still ?'

'God knows what I bid,' said Torfrida, bursting into tears. 'Let me go and pray, for I never needed it more.'

Hereward watched her kneeling, as he sat moody, all but desperate. Then he glided to her side and said gently :

'Teach me how to pray, Torfrida, as you and my mother pray.'

And she put her arms round the wild man's neck, and tried to teach him, like a little child.

CHAPTER 13

How Hereward fulfilled his Promise to the Prior of Peterborough

IN the course of that winter died good Abbot Brand. A week after came the news that Thorold, the Norman whom William had appointed abbot in his place, was coming to take charge of the Abbey of Peterborough, and had got as far as the town of Stamford, with a grand company of knights and priests.

Then Hereward sent Abbot Thorold word that if he or any of his Frenchmen entered Peterborough, he, Hereward, would burn the abbey over their heads. And that if he rode a mile beyond Stamford town, he should walk back into it barefoot in his shirt. Therefore Thorold remained in Stamford.

A week after that, and the Danes were come. Asbiorn's fleet had been reinforced by another fleet with Sweyn, King of Denmark, himself at its head; and the combined fleets sailed up the river Ouse towards Ely.

Hereward hurried to them with all his men. He was anxious to prevent their plundering the people as they went. Food, of course, they must take where they could find it; but outrages and violence must be avoided.

He found the Danes in a dangerous mood, sulky and disgusted, as they had good right to be. They had come to conquer England, and there seemed to them nothing left to conquer but a few bogs. All the more were they eager to steal any treasures they could find in that wilderness of fen. They knew that the monasteries were rich; and they threatened to plunder Crowland Abbey as their forefathers had done once before them. English gold they would have, if they could not get fat English land.

'No! not Crowland!' said Hereward. Any place but Crowland, endowed and honoured by Canute the Great,—Crowland, whose abbot was a Danish nobleman, whose monks were all Danes, of their own flesh and blood. Canute's soul would rise up and curse them, if they took the value of a penny from St. Guthlac. St. Guthlac was their good friend. He would send them bread, meat, ale, all they needed, but woe to the man who set foot upon his ground.

Hereward sent off messengers to Crowland, warning all to be ready to escape into the fens; and entreating Ulfketyl, the abbot, to empty his storehouses into his boats, and send food to the Danes, before a day was past. And Ulfketyl worked hard and well, till a line of boats wound its way through the fens, laden with meat and bread, and ale-barrels in plenty; and with monks too, who welcomed the Danes as their brethren, talked to them in their own tongue, blessed them in St. Guthlac's name as the saviours of England; and then went home again, singing so sweetly their thanks to Heaven for their safety, that the wild Vikings were awed, and agreed that St. Guthlac's men were wise folk and open-hearted, and that it was a shame to do them harm.

But plunder they must have.

'And plunder you shall have!' said Hereward, as a sudden thought struck him. 'I will show you the way to Peterborough, the richest monastery in England, and all its treasures shall be yours, if you will treat Englishmen as friends, and spare the people of the fens.'

It was a great crime in the eyes of men of that time. A great crime, taken simply, in Hereward's own eyes. But necessity has no law. Something the Danes must have, and ought to have; and St. Peter's gold was better in their purses than in that of Thorold and his French monks. So he led them up the fens and rivers till they saw the towers of Peterborough Abbey before them on the wooded hills.

There were two parties in Peterborough Abbey : a smaller party of stout-hearted English ; a larger one which favoured William and the French customs, with Prior Herluin at their head. Herluin knew that evil was coming on him. He knew that the Danes were in the fen. He knew that Hereward was with them. He knew that they had come to Crowland. Hereward could never mean to let them sack it. Peterborough must be their point. And Herluin set his teeth, like a bold man determined to abide the worst, and barred and barricaded every gate and door.

That night the monks of Peterborough prayed in the Abbey Church till early morning. When the first light of the summer's dawn began to show in the north-eastern sky they heard, mingling with their prayers, another sound—the terrible war-song of the Vikings of the north. They stopped praying. With white faces and trembling knees they fled up into the tower, and looked out north-eastward over the fen.

The first rays of the summer sun were just streaming over the vast expanse of green, and glittering upon the winding river ; and shining, too, upon a seemingly endless line of long black boats filled with armed men, and on the flash and foam of innumerable oars.

And nearer and louder came the noise of the oars, like thunder working up the sky ; and mingled with it, that grim and terrible war-cry. As the ships came nearer, the monks could see the banners of the two foremost vessels. One was the terrible white and red banner of Denmark ; the other, the scarcely less terrible banner of Hereward.

‘He will burn the abbey!’ said the monks to each other when they saw Hereward’s flag. ‘He has vowed to do it. As a child he vowed it, and he must do it. The devil chose out and inspired this man from his birth that he might be the foe and robber of St. Peter!’

The Danes were landing now. The shout which they gave as they leaped on shore made the hearts of the poor

monks sink low. Would they be murdered, as well as robbed? Perhaps not—probably not. Hereward would see to that. And some wanted to surrender.

Herluin would not hear of it. They were safe enough, he said. The walls and gates were strong. Let the Danes howl and rage about the holy place, till Abbot Thorold and the Frenchmen came and drove them back to their ships.

The cunning Herluin was not far wrong. The Danes came up through the little town and to the Abbey gates; but entrance was impossible; and they prowled round and round like raging wolves round a farm-house in winter; but found no way to get in.

Prior Herluin grew bold; and looking cautiously down from the gateway tower, began to curse them violently.

'Aha, Herluin? Are you there?' asked a short square man in bright-coloured armour. 'Have you forgotten how you tried to burn Hereward and me thirty years since?'

'You are Winter?' said the prior, and cursed more violently than ever.

Some of the Danes drew their bows to shoot at him, but Winter shouted:

'Put your bows down, men! If you shoot that man, I'll cut your heads off. He is the oldest foe I have in the world, and nobody shall touch him but me.'

The Danes saw that there was some joke, and joined Winter in jeering at the prior; while Herluin mocked, and scolded and argued, and then threatened.

Winter stood laughing and jeering in return for full ten minutes. At last he shouted—

'Go and look at the other gate. Hereward has set fire to it, and it should be burnt through by this time. Go and see!'

Herluin disappeared with a curse. 'Now, men,' cried Winter, 'we'll go to the other gate and all start fair.'

The gate was on fire; and so was the town; and, in a few minutes, the monastery likewise.

When the fire had done its work, the Danes rushed into the gate, while Hereward and Winter stood and looked with their men, whom they kept close together, waiting their commands. The Danes and their allies cared not for the great glowing heap. They cared not for each other, hardly for themselves. They rushed into the gap, they thrust the glowing heap inward through the gateway with their lances; they thrust each other down into it, and trampled over them to fall themselves, rising scorched and withered, and yet struggling on toward the gold of Peterborough.

It was wild work. But Peterborough was won.

'We must in now and save the monks,' said Hereward, and dashed over the embers.

He was only just in time. In the midst of the great court were all the monks, huddled together like a flock of sheep, some kneeling, most weeping bitterly, after the fashion of monks.

Only Herluin stood in front of them, at bay, a big crucifix in his hand. He had no mind to weep. But with a face of calm and bitter wrath, he preferred words of peace and entreaty. But his fair speeches profited little, for the Danes crowded and howled round him and tried to tear the crucifix from his hands. In a moment more blood would have been shed, and then a general massacre would have followed.

Hereward saw it, and shouting, 'After me, Hereward's men! A Wake! A Wake!' hurled the Danes right and left, and stood face to face with Herluin.

An angry Finn smote him on the back of his head full with a stone axe. He staggered, and then looked round and laughed.

'Fool! have you not heard that Hereward's armour is magic? Off, and hunt for gold, or it will be all gone.'

The Finn, who was astonished at getting no more from his blow than a few sparks, and expected instant death in return, took the hint and vanished, as did his fellows.

'Now, Herluin the Frenchman!' said Hereward.

'Now, Hereward the robber of saints!' said Herluin.

It was a fine sight. The soldier and the churchman; the Englishman and the Frenchman, the man of the then world, and the man of the then Church, face to face.

'A robber and a child of the devil you have been from your birth,' said Herluin: 'and a robber and a child of the devil you are now. Now you have come to slay the servants of St. Peter, and add one more great sin to the rest!'

Hereward laughed so jolly a laugh that the prior was surprised.

'Slay St. Peter's monks? No, no. Not a hair of your heads shall be touched. But I must clear out all Frenchmen, and all Englishmen who love Frenchmen, from this place. Here, Hereward's men! make these traitors and their French prior march safe out of the walls into the woods.'

'Out of this place I will not go,' said Herluin. 'Here I am; and here I will live or die.'

But as he spoke he was suddenly pushed forward almost into Hereward's arms by the whole body of monks, who, when they heard Hereward's words, cared to hear no more, but, desperate between fear and joy at their escape, rushed out, carrying away their prior in the midst. As they dragged him away, Herluin shouted:

'You were made a knight in this church. Then behave as a knight, and save the guest-house: there are women, ladies there!'

Hereward uttered a cry of horror. If these wild men had got in there, all was lost. He rushed to the door. It was not yet burst in; but a bench, swung by strong arms, was battering it in fast.

'Winter! Geri! Siwards! To me, Hereward's men! Stand back, fellows. Here are friends here inside. If you do not, I'll cut you down.'

But in vain. The door was burst, and in poured the savage mob. Hereward, unable to stop them, headed them, or pretended to do so, with five or six of his own men round him, and went into the hall.

On the floor lay some half-dozen servants. They were butchered instantly, simply because they were there. Hereward saw: but could not prevent. He ran as hard as he could to the foot of the wooden stair which led to the upper floor.

'Guard the stair-foot, Winter!' and he ran up.

Two women cowered upon the floor, shrieking and praying with hands clasped over their heads. He saw that the arms of one of them were of the most delicate whiteness, and judging her to be the lady, bent over her. 'Lady! you are safe. I will protect you. I am Hereward.'

She sprang up, and threw herself with a scream into his arms.

'Hereward! Hereward! Save me. I am——'

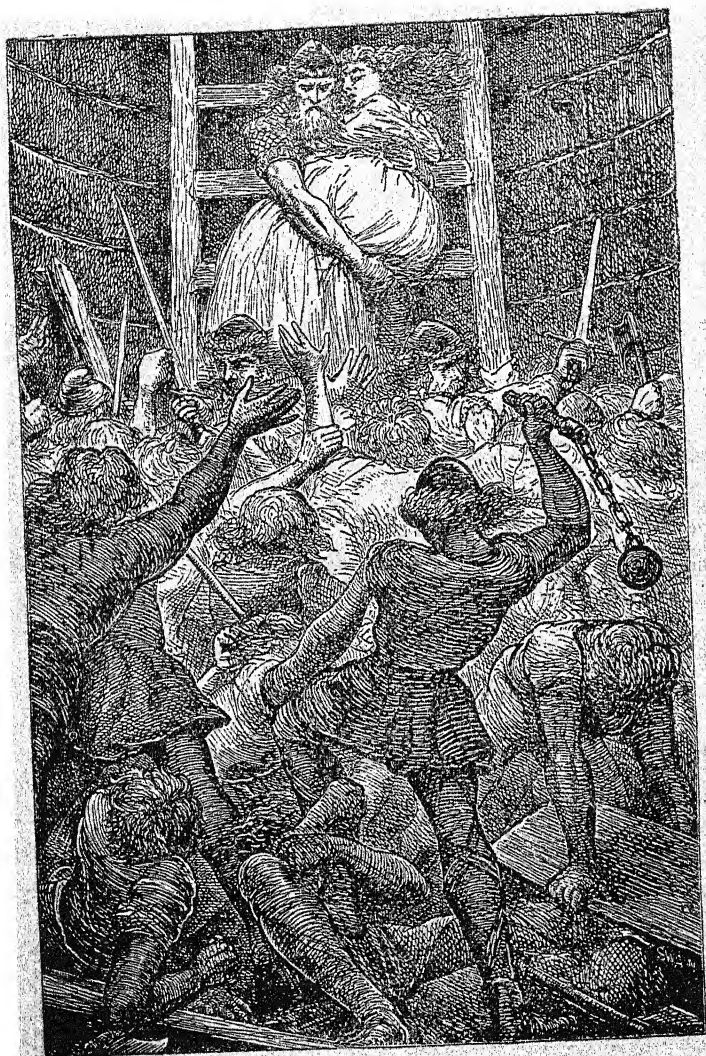
'Alftruda!' said Hereward.

It was Alftruda; if possible more beautiful than ever.

'I have got you!' she cried. 'I am safe now. Take me away—Out of this horrible place—Take me into the woods—Anywhere—Only do not let me be burnt here—stified like a rat. Give me air! Give me water!' And she clung to him so madly, that Hereward, as he held her in his arms, and gazed on her extraordinary beauty, forgot Torfrida for the second time.

But there was no time to indulge in evil thoughts, even had any crossed his mind. He caught her in his arms, and, commanding the maid to follow, hurried down the stair.

Winter and the Siwards were defending the foot with swinging swords. The savages were howling round like



“HEREWARD CAUGHT HER IN HIS ARMS, AND HURRIED DOWN
THE STAIRS.”

dogs about a bull ; and when Hereward appeared above with the women, there was a loud yell of rage and envy.

He should not have the women to himself—They would share the plunder equally—was shouted in half a dozen barbarous dialects.

‘Have you left any valuables in the chamber?’ whispered he to Alfruda.

‘Yes, jewels—robes—Let them have all, only save me!’

‘Let me pass!’ roared Hereward. ‘There is rich booty in the room above, and you may have it as these ladies’ ransom. Them you do not touch. Back, I say, let me pass!’

And he rushed forward. Winter and the housecarles formed round him and the women, and hurried down the hall; while the savages hurried up the ladder, to quarrel over their spoil.

Hereward sent Alfruda in charge of some of his men down to the ships; while he and Asbiorn watched the Danes pillaging the church and the monastery, until the evil work was finished.

Some drunken ruffians would have burnt the church for mere mischief. But Asbiorn, as well as Hereward, stopped that. And gradually they got the men down to the ships; some drunk, some struggling under plunder; some cursing and quarrelling because nothing had fallen to their lot. It was a hideous scene: but one to which Hereward, as well as Asbiorn, was too well accustomed to see anything in it save an hour’s trouble in getting the men on board.

The Danes were to go to Ely, and join the army there. Hereward would march on to Stamford; secure the town if he could; then to Huntingdon, to secure it likewise; and on to Ely afterwards.

‘You will not leave me among these savages?’ said Alfruda.

‘Heaven forbid! You shall come with me as far as Stamford, and then I will set you on your way.’

'My way?' said Alftruda, in a bitter and hopeless tone.

Hereward mounted her on a good horse, and rode beside her, looking—and he well knew it—a very perfect knight. Soon they began to talk. What had brought Alftruda to Peterborough, of all places on earth?

And Alftruda told him how she had quarrelled with her husband, Dolfin, the son of Gospatric, and left him; and said she did not know where to go for safety. She was very beautiful and fascinating, and did her best to charm Hereward and appeal to his pity; and in the charm of her presence he almost forgot Torfrida. He would like to have taken her back to Ely: but he knew that would not do. So he offered to send her to Lincoln, where her old friend Gilbert of Ghent was; for Lincoln was not far away. So when they arrived at Stamford, and found that Abbot Thorold had just left the town for Lincoln, Hereward sent Alftruda after him under a guard of his knights. He himself stayed at Stamford three days, to punish the citizens for giving refuge to Thorold and his Normans; and when his knights came back, he marched to Bourne. After which, he threw himself into Ely with Torfrida and all his men, and assumed, by consent of all, the command of the English who were there.

CHAPTER 14

How King William attacked Ely

Soon after Hereward got back to the camp of refuge at Ely a noble-looking man of his own age came into the abbey hall one day, and put his hand within his, and said:

'Do you not know me, Hereward, son of Leofric?'

'I know you not, good knight; but by your dress and bearing you must be a noble Viking.'

'I am Sigtryg, son of Ranald, and now King of Water-

ford. And my wife said to me—Go and help Hereward, son of Leofric, who twice saved me and brought me safe to you. And if you prove false to him, you are a coward ; and no coward is husband of mine.'

'You are Sigtryg, son of Ranald ?' cried Hereward, clasping him in his arms, as the scenes of his wild youth came back to his memory. 'Better is old wine than new, and old friends than new friends.'

'And I, and my five ships, are yours to death. Let who will go back.'

Glad was Hereward of his old friend's coming ; for his new friends, the Danes, were deserting him. A great conference between him and the English nobles, and King Sweyn and the Danish earls, had just been held in the great Abbey hall ; and after much angry argument the Danes had decided to go back to Denmark.

'I came,' Sweyn had said, 'to take my rightful kingdom of England, but found two kings already in it, both seemingly more welcome to the English than I am. While William the Frenchman is king by the sword, and Edgar the Englishman king by the proclamation of English earls, there seems no room here for Sweyn, nephew of Canute, the great king.'

So the Danes sailed away ; and Hereward went up to the Abbey tower, and watched their boats disappearing down the river Ouse towards the sea. When they were out of sight, he went back and lay on his bed and wept—once and for all. Then he arose and went down into the hall to the abbots and monks, and earls and knights, and was the boldest, cheeriest, wittiest of them all.

When William heard that the Danes were gone, he marched on Ely, as on an easy prey.

With him came Ivo Taillebois, eager to get full possession of the lands about Spalding town, which William had granted him out of the estates of the Leofric family, but the rents of which Hereward had been taking for his men

for twelve months past. He was an adventurer from Anjou in France—brutal, ignorant and profligate—low-born too (for his own men whispered, behind his back, that he was no more than his name 'Taillebois' meant, namely a 'wood-cutter's' son). But he was valiant and cunning and skilled in war. He and his men had fought like tigers by William's side at Hastings; and he had been rewarded with many an estate which had been Earl Leofric's, and should now have been Earl Edwin's, and Morcar's, or, it may be, Hereward's own. With William came, also, William de Warrenne, who had vowed to revenge the death of Sir Frederick, his brother, whom Hereward had slain. Ralph Guader was there, proud of his success against the Danes at Norwich. And with them were all the Frenchmen of the eastern counties, who had either been expelled from their lands by Hereward and the English earls, or were in fear of expulsion.

With them, too, was a great army of ruffians from all France and Flanders, hired to fight for a certain term, on the chance of plunder or of gifts in land. Their brains were all aflame with the tales of great riches hidden in Ely. There were there the jewels of all the monasteries round; there were the treasures of all the fugitive English nobles; there were there—what was there not? And they grumbled, when William halted them at Cambridge, and began to feel cautiously the strength of the place—which must be strong, or Hereward and the English would not have made it their camp of refuge.

William soon found that Ely, surrounded on all sides by bog and fen, would be no easy place to take. After examining the country all round for miles, he came to the conclusion that the only possible place to make an attack would be from the south, at the point where the bog was at its narrowest—half a mile between dry land and dry land. So all his host marched along the old road from Cambridge and encamped opposite Ely on the south;

and down to the edge of the bog poured countless men, bearing wood and faggots, cut from all the hills, that they might bridge that terrible, black half-mile.

They made a narrow firm path through the reeds, and down to the brink of the Ouse, if brink it could be called, where the water, rising and falling a foot or two each tide, covered the floating peat for many yards, before it sank into a brown depth of bottomless slime. They would make a bottom for themselves by driving piles, or heavy wooden posts.

The piles would not hold; and they began to make a floating bridge with long beams and blown-up cattle-hides to float them.

Soon they made a floating-sow (or raft covered over with a wooden roof to protect the attackers from arrows), and thrust it on before them as they worked across the stream; for they were getting under shot from the island.

Meanwhile, the besieged had not been idle. They had thrown up a wall of earth on the island shore, and overhanging scaffolds, through the floor of which they could shower down arrows. And so they awaited the attack, contenting themselves with gliding in and out of the reeds in their canoes, and annoying the builders with arrows.

At last the bridge was finished, and the sow safe across the half-mile; and thrust in, as far as it would float, among the reeds on the high tide. They in the fort could touch it with a pole.

The English would have destroyed it if they could. But The Wake bade them leave it alone. He had watched all their work, and made up his mind to the event.

'The rats have set a trap for themselves,' he said to his men; 'and we shall be fools to break it up till the rats are safe inside.'

So there the huge sow, or covered raft, lay, black and silent, showing nothing to the enemy but a side of strong

plank, covered with hide to prevent its being burned. It lay there for three hours, and The Wake let it lie.

He had never been so cheerful, so confident. 'Play the man this day, every one of you; and before nightfall you will have taught the Frenchman once more the lesson of York. He seems to have forgotten that. It is time to remind him of it.'

And he looked to his bow and to his arrows, and prepared to play the man himself; as was the fashion in those old days, when a general proved his worth by hitting harder and more surely than any of his men.

At last the army was in motion, and company after company moved down to the reed beds, and the assault began.

And now advanced along the road, and along the bridge, a dark column of men, surmounted by glittering steel; knights in complete mail; footmen in leather coats; at first orderly enough, each under the banner of his lord: but more and more mingled and crowded, as each hurried forward, eager for his selfish share of the treasures of Ely. They pushed along the bridge. The mass became more and more crowded; men stumbled over each other, and fell off into the mire and water, calling vainly for help: but their comrades hurried on unheeding, in the mad thirst for spoil.

On they came in thousands; and fresh thousands streamed out of the fields, as if the whole army intended to pour itself into the isle at once.

'They are numberless,' said Torfrida, in a serious and astonished voice, as she stood by Hereward's side.

'Would they were!' said Hereward. 'Let them come on. The more their numbers, the fatter will the fish below be, before to-morrow morning. Look there, already!'

And already the bridge was swaying, and sinking beneath their weight. The men, in places, were ankle deep in

water. They rushed on all the more eagerly ; filled the sow, and swarmed up to its roof.

Then, what with its own weight, what with the weight of the laden bridge which dragged upon it from behind, the huge sow began to tilt backwards, and slide down the slimy bank.

The men on the top tried vainly to keep their footing ; to hurl grappling irons into the earthen wall ; to shoot off their arrows.

‘ You must be quick, Frenchmen,’ shouted Hereward in derision, ‘ if you mean to come on board here.’

The French knew that well : and as Hereward spoke, two drawbridges were lowered from the front of the sow, over which reeled to the attack a close body of knights, mingled with soldiers bearing scaling ladders.

They recoiled. Between the ends of the drawbridges and the foot of the earthen wall were some twelve feet of black bog. The catastrophe which The Wake had foreseen was come, and a shout of derision arose from the unseen defenders above.

‘ Come on, leap it like men ! Send back for your horses, knights, and ride them at it like bold huntsmen ! ’

The front rank could not but rush on : for the pressure behind forced them forward, whether they would or not. In a moment they were wallowing waist deep ; trampled on ; disappearing under their struggling comrades, who disappeared in their turn.

‘ Look, Torfrida ! If they plant their scaling ladders, it will be on a foundation of their comrades’ corpses.’

Torfrida gave one glance through the openings of the wooden scaffold upon the writhing mass below, and turned away in horror. The men were not so merciful. Down between the beams of the scaffold rained stones, spears, arrows, increasing the agony and death. The scaling ladders would not stand in the mire ; if they had stood a moment, the struggles of the dying would have thrown

them down. And still fresh victims pressed on from behind, shouting, 'On to the gold of Ely!' And still the sow, under the weight, slipped farther and farther back into the stream, and the foul gulf widened between besiegers and besieged. Then above the shouts and curses of the combatants rose a dreadful yell.

The bridge, strained more and more by its living burden, and by the falling tide, had parted,—not at the Ely end, where the sliding of the sow took off the pressure,—but at the end nearest the camp. One sideway roll it gave, and then, turning over, engulfed in that foul stream the flower of Norman knighthood; leaving a line—a full quarter of a mile in length—of wretches drowning in the dark water, or, more hideous still, in the bottomless slime of peat and mud.

Thousands are said to have perished. Their armour and weapons were found at times, by farmers when digging and ploughing, for centuries after; are found at times to this day, beneath the rich drained corn-fields which now fill up that black half-mile.

William, they say, struck his tents and departed forthwith, 'groaning from deep grief of heart.' Eastward he went, and encamped the remains of his army at Brandon, where he seems to have begun that castle, the ruins of which still exist. He put a line of sentinels along the Red-dyke, which men now call the Devil's Ditch; and did his best to blockade the isle, as he could not storm it. And so ended the first attack on Ely.

CHAPTER 15

How Hereward played the Potter; and how he
cheated the King

FOR a month or two they of Ely had peace. But they were shut in both by land and water; and they knew not

what would be done, either by themselves or by the King. Would William simply try to starve them out? That would be a difficult and lengthy process, for they had abundance of cattle and game on the island and fish in the fen. Or was he gathering vast armies, to try another assault on the island, perhaps from several points at once?

They must send a spy, and find out news from the outer world, if news were to be got. But who would go?

So asked the bishop, and the abbot, and the earls, in council in the abbot's room. Torfrida was among them. She was always among them now. She was their wise woman, whose counsels all received as more than human.

'I am going myself,' answered Hereward.

'Uncle, uncle!' said the young earls, 'send Winter, Geri, Leofwin Prat, any of your good men: but not yourself. If we lose you, we lose our head and our king.'

And all begged Hereward to let any man go, rather than himself.

'I am going, lords and knights; and what Hereward says he does. It is one day to Brandon. It may be two days back; for I may have to come home round about. On the fourth day, you shall hear of me or from me. Come with me, Torfrida.'

And he strode out.

He cropped his golden locks, he cropped his golden beard; and Torfrida wept, as she cropped them, half with fear for him, half for sorrow over his shorn glories.

Then Hereward put on filthy garments; and taking mare Swallow with him, got into a boat and went across the river. There he met a potter carrying pots upon a pony. Hereward bought all his pots for a silver penny, and disguised himself in the potter's greasy coat. And when he got near to Brandon he walked into the town solemnly, leading the mare, and crying 'Pots!'

So lean and ill-looking was that famous mare that no one would suspect her splendid powers, or take her for

anything but a potter's horse, when she was harnessed in proper character. Hereward felt thoroughly at home in his part; as able to play the Englishman which he was by rearing, as the Frenchman which he was by education. He was full of heart and happy. He enjoyed the keen fresh air; he enjoyed the ramble out of the isle, in which he had been shut up so long; he enjoyed the jest of the thing—disguise, stratagem, adventure, danger.

By this time it was getting dark; so Hereward looked about for a night's lodging.

Outside the town was a wretched mud hut; and Hereward said to himself, 'This is bad enough to be good enough for me.'

So he knocked at the door; and knocked till it was opened, and a hideous old woman put out her head.

'Who wants to see me at this time of night?'

'Any one would, who had heard how beautiful you are. Do you want any pots?'

'Pots? What have I to do with pots, you saucy fellow? I thought it was some one wanting a charm.' And she shut the door.

'A charm?' thought Hereward. 'Perhaps she can tell me news if she is a witch.'

So he knocked again, till the old woman looked out once more, and angrily told him to go away.

'But I have nowhere to go for the night, mother,' said Hereward, 'and I am afraid of the French. I will give you the best pot of any kind you like for a night's lodging.'

The old woman hesitated; and then agreed to let him stay the night in her hut for two small jars, with an extra pot for stabling mare Swallow.

'You can sleep there on the straw,' she said. 'I have nothing to give you to eat.'

Hereward threw himself down on the floor, and in a few minutes snored loudly.

But he was never less asleep. He cautiously looked round the whole place ; and he listened to everything.

Presently the door of the hut opened, and another old woman came in, if possible uglier than the first. The two began talking in French, and Hereward listened with all his ears.

'Well, what news?' asked the first. 'Have you seen the King?'

'No; but I have seen Ivo Taillebois. But whom have you got lying there?'

'Only an English fool. He cannot understand us. Talk on; only don't wake him up.'

They talked on; and Hereward soon learnt that Ivo Taillebois had promised the witches much gold if they would help the King with their magic to take the island of Ely. The second witch had advised the King to attack the island in the same place, and had promised on the ninth day to bring a storm right in the faces of the English, so that they could neither fight nor see.

After hearing which news Hereward fell asleep, and was so tired that he lay like a log till morning.

'Get up!' screamed the old dame at last, kicking him, 'or I shall make you give me another pot for a double night's rest.'

He paid his lodging, put the baskets on the mare, and went on crying pots.

When he came to the outer gateway of the court, he tied up the mare, and carried the pots in on his own back, boldly. The servants saw him; and called him into the kitchen, to see his pots, without the least intention of paying for what they took.

A man of rank belonging to the court came in, and stared fixedly at Hereward.

'You are very much like that villain Hereward, man,' quoth he.

'What?' asked Hereward, looking as stupid as he could.

'If it were not for his brown face and his short hair, he is as like the fellow as a peasant can be to a knight.'

'Bring him into the hall,' said another; 'and let us see if any man knows him.'

Into the great hall he was brought, and stared at by knights and squires. He bent his knees, rounded his shoulders, and made himself look as mean as he could.

Ivo Taillebois and Earl Warrenne came down and had a look at him.

'Hereward?' said Ivo. 'I will warrant that little slouching cur is not he. Hereward must be half as big again, if it be true that he can kill a man with one blow of his fist.'

'You may try the truth of that for yourself some day,' thought Hereward.

'Does any one here talk English? Let us question the fellow,' said Earl Warrenne.

'Hereward? Hereward? Who wants to know about that villain?' answered the potter, as soon as he was asked in English. 'Would to heaven he were here, and I could see some of you noble knights and earls paying him for me: for I owe him more than ever I shall pay myself.'

'What does he mean?'

'He came out of the isle ten days ago, one evening, and drove off a cow of mine and four sheep, which was all my living, noble knights, except these pots.'

'And where is he since?'

'In the isle, my lords, well-nigh starved, and his folk falling away from him daily, from hunger and ague-fits. I doubt if there be a hundred sound men left in Ely.'

'Have you been in thither, then, villain?'

'Heaven forbid! I in Ely? I in the wolf's den? If I went in with nothing but my skin, they would have it off me before I got out again. Ah, if your lordships would but come down, and make an end of him once for all; for he is a great tyrant, and terrible, and devours us poor folk.'

'Take this babbler into the kitchen, and feed him, quoth Earl Warrenne; and so the conversation ended.

Into the kitchen again the potter went. The king's luncheon was preparing; so he listened to the servants' talk; and picked up this at least, which was valuable to him: that the witches' story was true; that a great attack would be made on Ely: that boats had been ordered up the river, and engineers were to be sent on that day.

But soon he had to take care of himself. Earl Warrenne's commands to feed him were construed by the cook-boys and servants into a command to make him drunk likewise. To make a laughing-stock of an Englishman was too tempting a jest to be resisted; and Hereward was made to drink much wine and beer. Then they teased him and insulted him, till Hereward could stand it no longer; and when one fellow pulled his beard and struck his face, Hereward, hot of temper and careless of life, struck him back again, right under the ear.

The fellow fell down as if he were dead. Then all the servants and cooks attacked Hereward in a body with sticks and kitchen utensils; and Hereward, seizing a bar of iron that was by the fire, defended himself so vigorously that in a few moments he had killed one, and driven the others backward in a heap.

But his case was hopeless. He was soon overpowered by numbers from outside, and dragged into the hall, to receive judgement for the mortal crime of slaying a man within the precincts of the court.

He kept up his heart. He knew that the King was there; he knew that he would most likely get justice from the King. If not, he could but reveal himself, and so save his life, for that William would kill him willingly he did not believe.

So he went in boldly and willingly, and up the hall, where, on the platform, stood William the Norman.

William had finished his luncheon, and was standing at

the board-side. A page held water in a silver basin, in which he was washing his hands. Two more knelt, and laced his long boots; for he was, as always, going a-hunting.

Then Hereward looked at the face of the great man, and felt at once that it was the face of the greatest man whom he had ever met.

'I am not that man's match,' said he to himself. 'Perhaps it will all end in my being his man, and he my master.'

'Silence, knaves!' said William, 'and speak one of you at a time. How came this?'

'A likely story, indeed!' said he, when he had heard. 'A poor English potter comes into my court, and murders my men under my very eyes for mere sport. I do not believe you, rascals! You, man,' and he spoke through an English interpreter, 'tell me your tale, and justice you shall have or take, as you deserve. I am the King of England, man, and I know your tongue, though I speak it not yet, more pity.'

Hereward fell on his knees.

'If you are indeed my Lord the King, then I am safe; for there is justice in you: at least so all men say.' And he told his tale manfully.

'Splendour of God! but this is a far likelier story, and I believe it. Hark you, you ruffians! Here am I, trying to conciliate these English by justice and mercy, whenever they will let me: and here are you outraging them, and driving them mad and desperate, just that you may get a handle against them, and thus rob the poor wretches and drive them into the forest. From the lowest to the highest—from Ivo Taillebois there, down to you cook-boys—you are all at the same game. And I will stop it! The next time I hear of outrage to unarmed man or harmless woman, I will hang that culprit, even if he were Odo my brother himself.'

This excellent speech was enforced with oaths so strange

and terrible, that Ivo Taillebois shook in his boots ; and the chaplain prayed fervently that the roof might not fall in on their heads.

‘ You smile, man ? ’ said William, quickly, to the kneeling Hereward. ‘ So you understand French ? ’

‘ A few words only, most gracious King, which we potters pick up, wandering everywhere with our goods,’ said Hereward, speaking in French ; for so keen was William’s eye, that he thought it safer to play no tricks with him.

Nevertheless, he made his French so base, that the very cooks grinned, in spite of their fear.

‘ Look you,’ said William, ‘ you are no common churl ; you have fought too well for that. Let me see your arm.’ Hereward drew up his sleeve.

‘ Potters do not carry sword-scars like those ; neither are they tattooed like English lords. Hold up your head, man, and let us see your throat.’

Hereward, who had carefully hung down his head to prevent his throat-patterns being seen, was forced to lift it up.

‘ Aha ! So I expected. There is fair ladies’ work there. Is not this he who was said to be so like Hereward ? Very good. Put him in prison till I come back from hunting. But do him no harm. For ’—and William fixed on Hereward eyes of the most intense intelligence—‘ if he were Hereward himself, I should be right glad to see Hereward safe and sound ; my man at last, and earl of all between Humber and the Fens.’

But Hereward did not rise at the bait. With a face of stupid and ludicrous terror he made reply in broken French.

‘ Have mercy, mercy, Lord King ! Make not that fiend earl over us. Even Ivo Taillebois there would be better than he. Send him to be earl over the devils in hell, or over the wild Welsh who are worse still : but not over us, good Lord King, whom he hath robbed till we are—’

‘ Silence ! ’ said William, laughing, as did all round him.

'You are a cunning rogue enough, whoever you are. Go and behave yourself till I come back.'

'May all saints send your grace good sport, and thereby me a good deliverance,' said Hereward, who knew that his fate might depend on the temper in which William returned. So he was thrust into an outhouse, and there locked up.

He sat on an empty barrel, meditating on the chances of his submitting to the King after all, when the door opened, and in strode one with a drawn sword in one hand, and a pair of leg-chains in the other.

'Hold out your legs, fellow! You are not going to sit at your ease there like an abbot, after killing one of us servants, and bringing the rest of us into disgrace. Hold out your legs, I say!'

'Nothing easier,' quoth Hereward cheerfully, and held out a leg. But when the man stooped to put on the fetters he received a kick which sent him staggering.

After which he recollected very little, at least in this world. For Hereward cut off his head with his own sword.

After which he broke away out of the house, and over garden walls, hiding and running, till he got to the front gate, and leaped upon mare Swallow.

And none saw him, save one unlucky horse-boy, who stood yelling and cursing in front of the mare's head, and went to seize her bridle.

Whereon, because of the imminent danger, Hereward's blood rose, and he smote that unlucky horse-boy: but whether he slew him or not is not known.

Then he shook up mare Swallow, and with one great shout of 'A Wake! A Wake!' rode for his life, with knights and squires (for the alarm was given) galloping at her heels.

Who then were astonished but those knights, as they saw the ugly potter's mare gaining on them, length after length, till she and her rider had left them far behind?

Who then was proud but Hereward, as the mare tucked her great thighs under her, and swept on over heath and

rabbit-burrow, over rush and fen, sound ground and rotten all alike to that enormous stride, to that keen bright eye which foresaw every footfall, to that long shoulder which picked her up again at every stagger ?

Hereward laid the bridle on her neck, and let her go. Fall she could not, and tire she could not ; and he half wished she might go on for ever. Where could a man be better, than on a good horse, with all the cares of this life blown away out of his brains by the keen air which rushed around his temples ! And he galloped on, as cheery as a boy.

But soon he began to wonder how he should get home to Ely. All the roads and ferries east of the island, as far south as Cambridge, would be guarded by French sentries ; and all the more surely on account of the approaching attack. The only safe way would be to ride south by the Roman roads. He would go right round the fens ; round Cambridge itself ; into the western forests. There he could lie hid till some friend should ferry him over to the western side of the island. The distance was great ; nearly fifty miles ; but Mare Swallow should do it, for the sake of her own fame as well as the safety of her master.

And she did it ; and, after his wonderful ride, Hereward and his mare were ferried by some English friends over to Ely from the woods on the western side.

CHAPTER 16

How King William attacked Ely the second Time

HEREWARD came back in fear and trembling after all. He believed in the magic powers of the witch of Brandon ; and he asked Torfrida, in his simplicity, whether she was not cunning enough to defeat her spells by counter spells. Torfrida smiled and shook her head.

'My knight, I have long since given up such vanities. Let us not fight evil with evil, but rather with good. Better are prayers than charms; for the former are heard in heaven above, and the latter only in the pit below. Let me and all the women of Ely go rather in procession to St. Etheldreda's well, and pray St. Etheldreda, the patron saint of Ely, to be with us when the day shall come; and defend her own isle, and the honour of us women who have taken refuge in her holy arms.'

So all the women of Ely walked out barefoot to St. Etheldreda's well, with Torfrida at their head, clothed in sackcloth, and with fetters on her wrists, and waist, and ankles; which she vowed, after the strange, sudden, earnest fashion of those times, never to take off again till she saw the French host flee from Ely before the face of St. Etheldreda. So they prayed, while Hereward and his men worked at the forts below. And when they came back, and Torfrida was washing her feet, sore and bleeding from her pilgrimage, Hereward came in:

'You have murdered your poor soft feet, and gained nothing thereby, I fear.'

'I have. If I had walked on sharp razors all the way, I would have done it gladly, to know what I know now. As I prayed I looked out over the fen; and St. Etheldreda put a thought into my heart. But it is so terrible a one, that I fear to tell it to you. And yet it seems our only chance.'

Hereward threw himself at her feet, and prayed her to tell. At last she spoke, as one half afraid of her own words:

'Will the reeds burn, Hereward?'

Hereward kissed her feet again and again, calling her his prophetess, his saviour.

'Burn! yes, like tinder, in this March wind, if the drought only holds. Pray that the drought may hold, Torfrida.'

'There, there, say no more. How hard-hearted war makes even us women! There, help me to take off this rough sackcloth, and dress myself again.'

Meanwhile William had moved his army again to Cambridge and thence to the place facing Ely from which he had made his first attack. And then he began to rebuild his bridge, broader and stronger than before; and commanded all the fishermen of the river Ouse to bring their boats and ferry over his materials. Amongst them one day came Hereward himself, in a small boat, with head and beard shaven lest he should be known, and worked diligently among the rest. But the sun did not set that day without mischief; for before Hereward went off, he finished his work by setting the whole on fire, so that it was all burnt, and some of the French killed and drowned.

And so The Wake went on, with stratagems and ambushes, till after seven days' continual fighting the Normans had hardly done one day's work. But on the eighth day they determined to attack the isle, putting in the midst of them the witch on a high place, where she might be safe freely to exercise her art.

On the other side, when Hereward's men marched down to the fort, Torfrida rode at their head on a white horse, robed from throat to ankle in sackcloth, her fetters clanking on her limbs. But she called on the English to see in her the emblem of England captive yet unconquered; and to break her fetters, and the worse fetters of every woman in England who was the toy and slave of the brutal invaders; and so fierce a triumph sparkled from her wild hawk-eyes that the Englishmen looked up to her weird beauty as to that of an inspired saint; and when the French came on to the assault there stood on the grassy mound behind the English fort a figure clothed in sackcloth, barefooted and bareheaded, with fetters shining on waist, and wrist, and ankle—her long black locks streaming in the wind, her long white arms stretched cross-wise toward heaven; praying



TORRIDA, THE EMBLEM OF ENGLAND CAPTIVE YET UNCONQUERED

St. Etheldreda and all the powers of heaven, and chanting doom and defiance to the invaders.

And the English looked on her, and cried : ' She is a prophetess ! We will surely do some great deed this day, or die around her feet like heroes ! '

And opposite to her, upon the French tower, the old woman of Brandon howled and muttered with filthy gestures, calling for the thunderstorm which did not come ; for all above the sky was cloudless blue.

And the English saw and felt the contrast between the spirit of cruelty and darkness, and the spirit of freedom and light.

So strong was the new bridge, that William trusted himself upon it on horseback, with Ivo Taillebois at his side.

William doubted the powers of the witch, and felt rather ashamed of his new helpmate ; but he was confident in his bridge, and in the heavy engines which he had placed in his four towers.

Ivo Taillebois was utterly confident in his witch, and in the bridge likewise.

William waited for the rising of the tide ; and when the tide was near its height, he commanded the artillery to open, and clear the fort of the opposite English. Then with crash and twang, the war engines went off, and great stones and heavy lances hurtled through the air.

' Back ! ' shouted Torfrida, raised almost to madness by fasting, self-torture, and religious frenzy. ' Out of yonder fort, every man. Why waste your lives under that artillery ? Stand still this day, and see how the saints of heaven shall fight for you.'

So utter was the reverence which she commanded for the moment, that every man drew back, and crowded round her feet outside the fort.

' The cowards are fleeing already. Let your men go, Sir King ! ' shouted Taillebois.

'On to the assault! Strike for Normandy!' shouted William.

'I fear much,' said he to himself, 'that this is some stratagem of that Wake's. But conquered they must be.'

And then came a trampling of many feet, and a low murmur which rose into loud shouts as the army poured along the bridge and past the witch of Brandon.

'Forward, men! Forward!' shouted William, riding out to the bridge-end.

'Forward!' shouted Ivo Taillebois.

'Forward!' shouted the ugly witch overhead. 'The spirit of the well fights for you!'

'Fight for yourselves,' said William.

There were fifty yards of deep clear water between Frenchman and Englishman. Only fifty yards. Not only the arrows, but heavy spears, flew across every moment; every now and then a man fell forward, and plunged into the blue depth among the fish, to find his comrades of the summer before; and then the stream was still once more. The water-fowl swam in and out of the reeds, and wondered what it was all about. Fifty yards of deep clear water. And treasure untold to win by crossing it.

They thrust out boats and rafts; they crawled upon them like ants, and thrust out more yet beyond, heedless of their comrades, who slipped, and splashed, and sank, holding out vain hands to hands too busy to seize them. And always the old witch jabbered overhead with her spells, pointing, praying for the storm; while all above, the sky was cloudless blue.

And always on the mound opposite, while darts and arrows whistled round her head, stood Torfrida, pointing with outstretched scornful finger at the strugglers in the river, and singing loudly what the Frenchman could not tell: but it made their hearts, as it was meant to do, melt like wax within them.

'They have a counter witch to yours, Ivo, it seems,'

said the king ; ' and a fairer one. I am afraid the devils are more likely to listen to her than to that ugly old woman of yours. What is the fair fiend pointing at so earnestly there ? '

' Something among the reeds. Hark to her now ! She is singing, somewhat more like an angel than a fiend, I will say for her.'

And Torfrida's song, coming clear and sweet across the water, rose louder and shriller till it almost drowned the jabbering of the witch.

' She sees more than we do.'

' But I see ! ' cried William, smiting his hand upon his thigh. ' By the splendour of God ! She has been showing them where to fire the reeds ; and they have done it ! '

A puff of smoke ; a wisp of flame ; and then another and another ; and a small boat shot out from the reeds on the French shore, and glided into the reeds of the island.

' The reeds are on fire, men ! Have a care,' shouted Ivo.

' Silence, fool ! Frighten them once, and they will leap like sheep into that gulf. Men ! right about ! draw off—slowly and in order. We will attack again to-morrow.'

The cool voice of the great captain arose too late. A line of flame was leaping above the reed bed, crackling and howling before the evening breeze. The column on the bridge had seen their danger but too soon, and fled. But whither ?

A shower of arrows fell upon the head of the column as it tried to face about and retreat, confusing it more and more. One arrow, shot by no common arm, went clean through William's shield, and pinned it to the mailed flesh. He could not stifle a cry of pain.

' You are wounded, sire. Ride for your life ! It is worth that of a thousand of these churls,' and Ivo seized William's bridle and dragged him, in spite of himself, through the cowering, shrieking, struggling crowd.

On came the flame, leaping and crackling, laughing and

shrieking, like a live fiend. The archers and slingers in the boats cowered before it ; and fell, scorched corpses, as it swept on. It reached the bridge, surged up, recoiled from the mass of human beings, then sprang over their heads and passed onwards, surrounding them with flame.

The reeds were burning around them ; the timbers of the bridge caught fire ; the peat and faggots smouldered beneath their feet. They sprang from the burning footway, and plunged into the fathomless bog, covering their faces and eyes with scorched hands ; and then sank in the black slime.

Ivo dragged William on, regardless of curses and prayers from his soldiery ; and they reached the shore just in time to see between them and the water a long black smouldering writhing line : the morass to right and left, which had been a minute before deep reed, an open dirty pool, dotted with boatsful of shrieking and cursing men ; and at the bridge end the tower, with the flame climbing up its posts, and the witch of Brandon throwing herself desperately from the top, and falling dead upon the embers, a motionless heap of rags.

' Fool that thou art ! Fool that I was ! ' cried the great king, as he rolled off his horse at his tent door, cursing with rage and pain.

Ivo Taillebois sneaked off ; sent over to Brandon for the second witch, and hanged her, as some small comfort to his soul.

The next day William withdrew his army. The men refused to face again that blood-stained pass. The English spells, they said, were stronger than theirs, and than the daring of brave men. Let William take Torfrida and burn her, as she had burned them, with reeds out of the fen : then might they try to storm Ely again.

Torfrida saw them turn, flee, die in agony. Her work was done ; her passion exhausted ; her self-torture, and the mere weight of her fetters, which she had sustained

during her passion, weighed her down ; she dropped senseless on the grass, and lay in a trance for many hours.

Then she arose, and, casting off her fetters and her sackcloth, was herself again : but a sadder woman till her dying day.

CHAPTER 17

How the Monks of Ely turned Traitors

If Torfrida was exhausted, so was Hereward likewise. He knew well that a repulse was not a defeat. He knew well the unconquerable persistence, the boundless resources, of the master-mind whom he defied ; and he knew well that another attempt would be made, and then another ; till, though it took seven years in the doing—Ely would be won at last. To hold out doggedly as he could was his plan : to obtain the best terms he could for his comrades. And he might obtain good terms at last. William might be glad to pay a fair price in order to escape such a thorn in his side as the camp of refuge, and might deal—or, at least, promise to deal—mercifully and generously with the last remnant of the English gentry. For himself, yield he would not : when all was over, he would flee to the sea, with Torfrida and his own men-at-arms, and turn Viking ; or go to Sweyn Ulfsson in Denmark, and die a free man.

The English did not foresee these things. Their hearts were lifted up with their victory, and they laughed at William and his French. Hereward did not care to undeceive them. But he could not help speaking his mind in the abbot's chamber to Thurstan, Egelwin, and his nephews, and to Sigtryg Ranaldsson, who was still in Ely, not only because he had promised to stay there, but because he could not get out if he would.

Shut in they were utterly, by land and water. The isle furnished a fair supply of food ; and what was wanting,

they obtained by foraging. But they had laid the land waste for so many miles round, that their plundering raids brought them in less than of old ; and if they went far, they fell in with the French, and lost good men, even though they were generally successful. So provisions were running somewhat short, and would run shorter still.

Moreover, there was a great cause of anxiety. Bishop Egelwin, Abbot Thurstan, and the monks of Ely were in rebellion, not only against King William, but more or less against the Pope of Rome. They might be excommunicated, that is, cut off from the Church, and their lands might be taken away.

Then King William took counsel with his barons how to destroy the camp of refuge at Ely, and capture or destroy Hereward and his men. And William's Italian chaplain advised that, as force had failed twice, cunning should be tried instead. His plan was to appeal to the greed and superstitious fears of the monks of Ely in order to persuade them to betray Hereward and his men. Let the King, he said, send them a message that, unless they submitted to him and His Holiness the Pope of Rome, their spiritual head, by a certain day, they should be excommunicated, and all their abbey lands taken away.

The advice pleased the King well ; but, because he would rather have Hereward, whom he admired, on his side, than driven to desperation, he decided to tempt him also to give up the struggle. So, turning to Ivo Taillebois, Sir Ascelin, and the other barons present, he said :

'Do this, by my command. Send a trusty monk to Ely. Let him tell the monks that we have determined to seize all their outlying lands, and have themselves excommunicated by Holy Church, unless they surrender within a week. And let him tell Hereward, by the faith and oath of William of Normandy, that if he will surrender himself to my grace, he shall have his lands in Bourne, and a free pardon for himself and all his comrades.'

If this message had reached Hereward in this form, he might have considered it no dishonour to yield on such terms, so desperate was the cause of the refugees in Ely.

But it did not suit the purposes of Ivo Taillebois and Sir Ascelin of Flanders, who had been entrusted with the sending of the message, that Hereward should be taken into the King's favour. Ivo Taillebois wanted Hereward's lands, and Sir Ascelin, who had once been Torfrida's champion, had never forgiven Hereward for marrying her.

'Listen to me,' said Ivo Taillebois, as the two plotted together. 'I must kill this accursed fox of a Wake. I hate him. I cannot eat my meat for thinking of him. Kill him I must.'

'And so must I,' said Sir Ascelin.

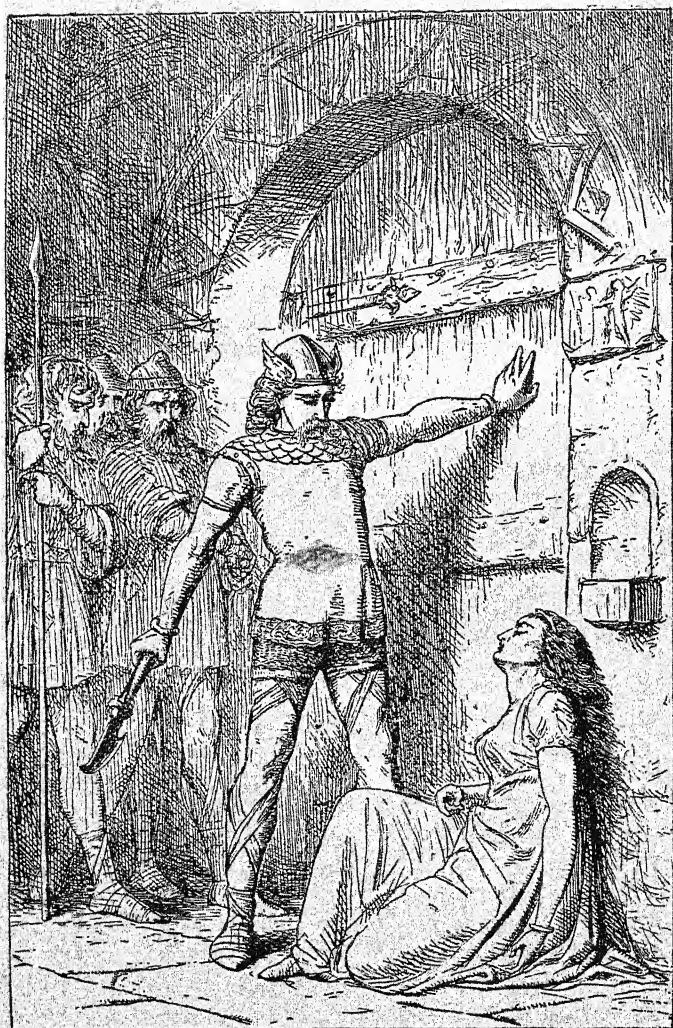
'Then we are both agreed. Let us work together. We must send the King's message. But we must add to it.'

'That is dangerous.'

'So is war; so is eating and drinking; so is everything. But we must not let Hereward come in. We must drive him to despair. Make the messenger add but one word—that the King does not extend the same mercy to the Lady Torfrida, but, on account of her abominable and notorious practice and witchcraft, demands that she shall be given up, to be judged as she deserves.'

So they sent a monk with the message, and commanded him to tell the condition about the Lady Torfrida, not only to Hereward, but to the abbot and all the monks.

When William's message reached Ely, Hereward was away with a large body of men and many boats, collecting food in the north-eastern fens. He had left Torfrida in the safe-keeping of his friend King Sigtryg of Waterford, because he had already begun to mistrust the monks. Torfrida, in her anger, sent back at once a short and fierce answer to the message—that William of Normandy was no knight himself or he would not have offered a knight



'SHALL WE BURST OPEN THE DOOR AND KILL THEM ALL?'

his life on condition of giving up his wife to be burned as a witch. Then she went down in her anger to tell the monks. But they had already received the message, and they had locked themselves into their council-chamber and were privately discussing the situation. Torfrida hurried back to Sigtryg, fearing treason, and foreseeing what effect the message would have upon the monks, who dreaded losing the wealth and lands of the abbey, and feared the anger of their patron saints.

But what could Sigtryg do? He could not find out what the monks were devising, because they talked in Latin. However, he and his men-at-arms came back with Torfrida to the locked door of the council-chamber, and stood round to guard her while she listened at the key-hole—for she knew the Latin tongue. She listened, with a beating heart, to their arguments for some time; then she sprang up, her face hot with anger, and said to Sigtryg:

‘We are betrayed. They are going to give the island up to William. All is lost!’

She fell back again, almost fainting, as she spoke.

‘Shall we burst open the door?’ cried Sigtryg, ‘and kill them all?’

‘No, King—no. They are God’s men; and we have blood enough on our souls.’

So all they could do was to wait in fear and trembling for Hereward’s return, and send Martin Lightfoot off to warn him, wherever he might be.

Martin found Hereward at last, and told him all. Hereward was already on his way home; and never did he and his men row harder than they rowed that day, back to Ely. He landed as the sun set, and hurried on with half his men, leaving the rest to take the food they had collected out of the boats. He was very anxious as to what the monks would do. And as for Torfrida, he was half mad. Ivo Taillebois’ addition to William’s

message had had its due effect. He vowed even more deadly hate against the Frenchman than he had ever felt before.

As he and his men hurried on, they heard a horse galloping violently towards them through the darkness. Hereward stopped his men. The horse pulled up amongst them. On its back was what seemed a boy, with a smaller boy behind him, clasping his waist.

'Hereward? Thank God, I am in time! And the child is safe, too. Thank God!' a voice cried.

It was the voice of Torfrida.

'Treason!' she gasped. 'The French are in the island. The whole army is marching from Cambridge.'

The men crowded round, shouting and asking a hundred questions. But she had nothing to tell, except that the French were coming, that the monks were traitors, and that she had just had time to disguise herself and her child in boys' clothes, pack up a few jewels, and jump on mare Swallow's back and escape. King Sigtryg and his men had gone out desperately to meet the French; but all was in confusion.

When the men heard this, a yell of fury and despair burst from their throats. Some shouted that they should go back to their boats, some shouted that they should go and attack the French as they were.

Hereward grew mad. 'On, men!' he shouted, 'we shall kill a few accursed Frenchmen before we die.'

But Torfrida flung her arms round him, weeping, and cried:

'Hereward, you shall not go on! If you go, I shall be taken. And if I am taken, I shall be burned as a witch. I cannot burn—I cannot! Take me away! Or kill me now, and here!'

Hereward paused. He had never seen Torfrida thus overcome. He knew it was utterly hopeless to go on. So he turned to his men, and said:

'We will go back to the boats, men. We must save our lives now, to fight these Frenchmen another day.'

And his men turned, and sullenly followed him. When they reached their companions on the shore, and told their story, they all decided to cross the lakes to some safe place. But where should they go?

'The Bruneswald Forest and the merry greenwood,' said Hereward.

'Hurrah for the merry greenwood!' shouted Leofric the Deacon. And the men, in the sudden delight of finding any place, any purpose, answered with a lusty cheer.

'Brave hearts!' said Hereward. 'We will live and die together like Englishmen.'

'We will, we will, Viking.'

'Where shall we put the mare?' asked Geri, 'the boats are full already.'

'Leave her to me. Get on board, Torfrida.'

He got on board last, leading the mare by the bridle.

'Swim, good lass!' said he, as they pushed off; and the good lass, who had done it many a time before, waded in, and was soon swimming behind. Hereward turned, and bent over the side in the darkness. There was a strange noise, a splash, and a swirl. He turned round, and sat upright again. They rowed on.

'That mare will never swim all the way,' said one.

'She will not need it,' said Hereward.

'Why?' said Torfrida, feeling in the darkness, 'she is loose. What is this in your hand? Your dagger? and wet?'

'Mare Swallow is at the bottom of the water. We could never have got her to swim all the way.'

'And you have killed her?' cried a dozen voices.

'Do you think that I would let a cursed Frenchman—ay, even William's self—say that he had ridden Hereward's mare?'

None answered; but Torfrida, as she laid her head upon her husband's bosom, felt the great tears running down from his cheek on to her own.

None spoke a word. The men were awe-stricken. There was something despairing and ill-omened in the deed. And yet there was a savage grandeur in it, which bound their savage hearts still closer to their chief.

And so mare Swallow's bones lie somewhere in the peat of the fens unto this day.

At last they got across the lakes to the mainland, and afterwards took refuge in the Bruneswald Forest. Hereward sent out spies, who came back in a week or two with sad news. Of the rest of the English in Ely, some had escaped, some had been taken by surprise and killed. The treacherous Frenchmen had broken their promise, and burned the town of Ely, and killed and robbed the people. The monks had got little out of their treachery: for, though their lives were spared, all their treasures had been taken by William, and the Abbey left bare. Abbot Thurstan died a few months later, of sorrow and shame. Egelwin, Bishop of Durham, was taken and shut up in prison: where he soon died. And so ended the Camp of Refuge, and the glory of the isle of Ely!

CHAPTER 18

How Hereward lost Torfrida

So Hereward went to the greenwood, to be a bold outlaw. Though he and his men had lost Ely, they never dreamt of submitting. Winter, Geri, Gwenoch, Leofric, and others of his old companions were still with him; and to him gathered many more—Englishmen who had been turned off their lands by the Normans—till he had about four hundred desperate men. They lived in the great Bruneswald Forest, and led a free and merry

life. They hunted the deer, in which the forest abounded ; and every now and then crept out of the forest by night and, with the terrible war-cry of 'A Wake! A Wake!' attacked and sacked and burnt the towns held by the French. They were poachers and robbers—and why not ? The deer had once been theirs, the land, and the farm ; and when they hunted the deer and robbed the farms and towns, they felt they were simply taking back part of their own possessions which the Normans had stolen from them.

The Norman barons often tried to catch them ; but it was easy to escape in the great forest. Once Ivo Taillebois and Sir Ascelin, with Abbot Thorold of Peterborough, came with a great force of knights and men-at-arms ; but Hereward had had warning from his old friend, Alfruda, and was ready for them, and took the whole force by surprise. Thorold and Sir Ascelin he captured and made them pay a heavy ransom ; and Ivo Taillebois had to fly with the loss of most of his men.

Alfruda had loved Hereward ever since the day he had rescued her as a little girl from the great white bear ; and she now set herself to win him. Hereward was grateful to her for her timely warning, and vain of her admiration. So he was glad to get the letters which she began to send to him secretly from Lincoln, though he still loved Torfrida, to whom he had always been faithful. In one of these letters she wrote :

' Oh, that you would change your mind, much as I honour you for it. Oh, that you would come in to the king, who loves and trusts you, having seen your constancy and faith, proved by so many years of affliction. Great things are open to you, and great joys ;—I dare not tell you what : but I know them, if you would come in. You, to waste yourself in the forest, an outlaw and a savage ! Opportunity once lost never returns ; time flies fast, Hereward, my friend, and we shall all grow old,

—I think at times that I shall soon grow old. And the joys of life will be impossible, and nothing left but vain regrets.'

And Hereward began to ponder in his heart whether it was worth while continuing the struggle. Would it not be better to give it up, and make his peace with the Conqueror? But he did not acknowledge yet, even to himself, that it was the beautiful Alfruda that was influencing his thought.

The weary months ran on, from summer into winter, and winter into summer again, for two years and more, and neither Torfrida nor Hereward was the better for them. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and, a sick heart is but too apt to be a peevish one. So there were fits of despondency, quarrels, unkind words. 'If I had not taken your advice, I should not have been here.' 'If I had not loved you so well, I might have been very differently off.' And so forth. The words were wiped away the next hour, perhaps the next minute, by kisses; but they had been said, and would be recollected, and perhaps said again.

Then, again, the 'merry greenwood' was merry enough in the summer; but it was a sad enough place in the wet autumn and winter, when the damp fogs crept about the trees, and the ground was sodden with rain. Then they suffered from coughs and colds and rheumatism; and sometimes there was not enough to eat. And the men gambled and drank and quarrelled; and Torfrida sat stitching and sewing, and mending and making their clothes, her eyes smarting with the smoke of the wood-fires, her hands sore and coarse with too much work, her face growing thin, and all her beauty worn away for very trouble. Hereward, too, was getting coarse and going back to his old drinking habits; and they began to be estranged from one another.

Alas! for them. There were many excuses. Sorrow

may be a softening medicine at last, but at first it is often a hardening one. Away from law, from refinement, from elegance, they were sinking gradually down to the level of the coarse men and women about them; the worse, and not the better, parts of their character were getting the upper hand; and it was possible that after a while the hero might sink into a ruffian, the lady into an untidy and quarrelsome woman.

But in justice to them be it said that neither of them had complained of the other to any living soul. Their love had been as yet too perfect, too sacred, for them to confess to another (and thereby confess to themselves) that it could in any wise fail. They had each idolized the other, and been too proud of their idolatry to allow that their idol could crumble or decay.

And yet at last that point too was reached. One day they were quarrelling about somewhat, as they too often quarrelled, and Hereward in his temper let fall the words, 'As I said to Winter the other day, you grow harder and harder upon me.'

Torfrida started and fixed on him wide, terrible, scornful eyes. 'So you complain of me to your companions?'

And she turned and went away without a word. A gulf had opened between them. They hardly spoke to each other for a week.

So things went on, from bad to worse. Then Torfrida found, from Martin Lightfoot, that Hereward was getting letters from Alfruda, which he never showed to her. So his heart was going to her rival. At first she wept in her misery, until she could weep no more; and then day after day she went about her duties cold and scornful.

At last, one day, Martin came to her mysteriously again. She trembled, for she had noticed in him lately a strange change. He had lost his usual talkativeness and quaint humour; and had fallen back into his old habit

of sullen silence. He must evidently know of evil which he dared not tell.

'There is another letter come,' he said. 'It came last night.'

'What is that to you or me?' she said angrily. 'My lord has his state secrets. Is it for us to try to find them out? Go!'

Martin went. Torfrida paced madly up and down the farm-house. Then she settled herself into fierce despair.

There was a noise of trampling horses outside. The men were arming and saddling, seemingly for a raid.

Hereward hurried in for his armour. When he saw Torfrida, he blushed scarlet.

'You want your arms,' said she quietly; 'let me fetch them.'

'No, never mind. I can arm myself; I am going south-west, to pay Taillebois a visit. I am in a great hurry. I shall be back in three days. Then—good-bye.'

He snatched his arms off a peg, and hurried out again, dragging them on. As he passed her, he offered to kiss her; she put him back, and helped him on with his armour, while he thanked her confusedly.

'He was as glad not to kiss me, after all!'

She looked after him as he stood, his hand on his horse's neck. How noble he looked! And a great yearning came over her. To throw her arms round his neck once, and then to stab herself, and set him free, dying, as she had lived, for him.

Two bonny boys were wrestling on the lawn, young outlaws who had grown up in the forest with ruddy cheeks and iron limbs.

'Ah, Winter!' she heard him say, 'had I had such a boy as that!—'

She heard no more. She turned away, her heart dead within her. She knew all that those words implied, in days when the possession of land was everything to the

free man; and the possession of a son necessary to pass that land on in the ancestral line. Only to have a son; only to prevent the old estate passing, with an heiress, into the hands of strangers, what crimes did not men commit in those days, and find themselves excused for them in public opinion? Hereward was the last of his line. What wonder if he longed for a son to pass his name down to future generations?

As she went into her room she saw, lying on the floor, an open letter.

She picked it up, surprised at seeing such a thing there, and kneeling down, held it eagerly to the wax candle.

She knew the handwriting in a moment. It was Alftruda's.

This, then, was why Hereward had been so strangely hurried. He must have had that letter and dropped it.

Her mind and eye took it all in in one instant, as the lightning flash reveals a whole landscape. And then her mind became as dark as that landscape when the flash is past.

The letter congratulated Hereward on having shaken himself free from the fascinations of that witch, Torfrida. It said that all was settled with King William. Hereward was to come to Winchester. She had the King's writ for his safety ready to send to him. The King would receive him as his follower. Alftruda would receive him as her husband, and so on.

Men, and beasts likewise, when stricken with a mortal wound, will run, and run on, blindly, aimless, impelled by the mere instinct of escape from intolerable agony. And so did Torfrida. Half undrest as she was, she fled forth into the forest, she knew not whither.

She cast a passing glance at the girl who lay by her, sleeping a pure and gentle sleep——

'Oh, that you had been but a boy!' Then she thought no more of her, not even of Hereward: but all of which

she was conscious was a breast and brain bursting; an unbearable choking, from which she must escape.

She ran, and ran on, for miles. She knew not whether the night was light or dark, warm or cold. Her tender feet might have been ankle deep in snow. The branches over her head might have been howling in the tempest, or dripping with rain. She knew not, and heeded not.

At last she noticed a man close beside her. He had been following her a long way, she recollected now: but she had not feared him, even heeded him. But when he laid his hand upon her arm, she turned fiercely: but without dread.

She looked to see if it was Hereward. To meet him would be death. If it were not he she cared not who it was. It was not Hereward; and she cried angrily, 'Off! Off!' and hurried on.

'But you are going the wrong way! The wrong way!' said the voice of Martin Lightfoot.

'The wrong way! Fool, which is the right way for me, save the path which leads to a land where all is forgotten?'

'To Crowland! To Crowland! To the good monks and the Lady Godiva!' cried Martin.

'You are right! Crowland, Crowland; and a nun's cell till death. Which is the way, Martin?'

'Oh, a wise lady! A reasonable lady! But you will be cold before you get thither. There will be a frost before morning. So when I saw you run out, I caught up something to put over you.'

Torfrida shuddered, as Martin wrapt her in the white bear's skin.

'No! Not that! Anything but that!' and she struggled to shake it off.

'Then you will be dead before dawn. Folks that run wild in the forest thus, for but one night, die.'

'Would God I could die!'

'That shall be as He wills : you do not die while Martin can keep you alive. Why, you are staggering already.'

Martin caught her up in his arms, threw her over his shoulder as if she had been a child, and hurried on, in the strength of madness.

They passed out of the forest, and at last came to the river. There Martin found a boat, in which he put Torfrida, and himself took the oars.

As they passed the town of Bourne, and saw the roofs of the houses shining in the moonlight, Torfrida shrieked three times, 'Lost ! Lost ! Lost !' with such a dreadful cry that the wild-fowl rose up out of the reeds, and the watch-dogs howled, and folk told fearfully next morning how a white ghost had gone down in the night from the forest to the fen, and wakened them with an unearthly scream.

It was morning when they came to Crowland Abbey. Torfrida stepped out of the boat without Martin's help, and drawing the bear-skin closely round her, and over her head, walked straight up to the gate of the house of the nuns.

All men wondered at the white ghost : but Martin walked behind her, his left finger on his lips, his right hand grasping his little axe, with such a stern and serious face, and so fierce an eye, that all drew back in silence, and let her pass.

The portress looked through the little gate.

'I am Torfrida,' said a voice of terrible calm. 'I am come to see the Lady Godiva. Let me in.'

The portress opened, utterly astounded.

'Madam ?' said Martin eagerly, as Torfrida entered.

'What ? What ?' she seemed to waken from a dream. 'God bless you, good and faithful servant ;' and she turned again.

'Madam ? Say !'

'What ?'



' MARTIN HURRIED ON, IN THE STRENGTH OF MADNESS '

'Shall I go back, and kill him?' And he held out the little axe.

Torfrida snatched it from his grasp with a shriek, and cast it inside the convent door.

Speaking to no one, Torfrida went straight into Lady Godiva's chamber. There she fell at the Countess's feet, and laid her head upon her knees, and wept bitterly and long. And then she told Lady Godiva all, with speech so calm and clear that Godiva was awed by the power and spirit of that marvellous woman. But she groaned in bitterness of soul at the treachery and sin of Hereward, her son.

So Torfrida took refuge in Crowland. And she cut off her black hair, now streaked with grey, and put on the nun's dress, and became a nun thenceforth.

On the second day there came to Crowland Leofric the priest, Hereward's old companion, bringing with him Torfrida's child. She had woken in the morning and found no mother; and, guessing she had gone to Crowland, had prayed, and at last commanded them to take her to Crowland too. And to Crowland they came. And when Leofric heard from Martin the story of Hereward's treachery and cruelty, he vowed to turn monk again, and stay, like Martin, with his Lady Torfrida to protect her.

Hereward came back on the third day, and found his wife and daughter gone. His guilty conscience told him in the first instance why. For he went into the chamber, and there, upon the floor, lay the letter which he had looked for in vain.

He raged and blustered. He must hide his shame. He must justify himself to his knights; and much more to himself: or if not justify himself, must shift some of the blame over to the opposite side. So he raged and blustered. He had been robbed of his wife and daughter. They had been, said he, enticed away by the monks of Crowland. What villains were those to rob an honest man of his family while he was fighting for his country?

So he rode down to the river, and there took two great boats, and rowed away to Crowland, with forty men-at-arms.

And all the while he thought of Alftruda, as he had seen her at Peterborough.

And of no one else ?

Not so. For all the while he felt that he loved Torfrida's little finger better than Alftruda's whole body, and soul as well.

So they came to Crowland ; and Hereward landed and beat upon the gates, and spoke high words. But the monks did not open the gates for awhile. At last the gates creaked, and opened ; and in the gateway stood Abbot Ulfketyl in his robes of state, and behind him the prior, and all the officers, and all the monks of the house.

'Comes Hereward in peace or in war ?'

'In war !' said Hereward.

Then that true and trusty old man lifted up his head, and said, like a valiant Dane, 'Against the traitor and the adulterer——'

'I am neither,' roared Hereward.

'You would be, if you could.'

'Preach me no sermons, man ! Let me in to seek my wife.'

'Over my body,' said Ulfketyl, and laid himself down across the threshold.

Hereward stepped back. If he had dared to step over that sacred body, there was not a blood-stained ruffian in his crew who dared to follow him.

'Rise, rise ! for God's sake, Lord Abbot,' said he. 'Whatever I am, I need not that you should disgrace me thus. Only let me see her—reason with her.'

'She has vowed herself to God, and is none of yours henceforth.'

'It is against the law. A wrong and a robbery.'

Ulfketyl rose, grand as ever.

'Hereward, son of Leofric, our joy and our glory once. Harken to the old man who will soon go whither thine Uncle Brand is gone, and be free of Frenchmen, and of all this wicked world. When the walls of Crowland dare not shelter the wronged woman, fleeing from man's treason to God's faithfulness, then let the roofs of Crowland burn till the flame reaches heaven, for a sign that the children of God are as false as the children of this world, and break their faith like any belted knight.'

Hereward was silenced. His men shrank back from him. He felt as if God was shrinking back from him likewise. He tried persuasion.

'At least you will let me have speech with her, or with my mother?'

'They must answer that, not I.'

Hereward sent in, entreating to see one, or both.

'Tell him,' said Lady Godiva, 'who calls himself my son, that my sons were men of honour, and that he must have been changed at his birth.'

'Tell him,' said Torfrida, 'that I have lived my life, and am dead. Dead. If he would see me, he will only see my corpse.'

'You would not slay yourself?' said Godiva.

'What is there that I dare not do? You do not know Torfrida. He does.'

And Hereward did; and went back again like a man stunned.

After awhile there came by boat to Crowland all Torfrida's wealth: clothes, jewels; not a shred had Hereward kept. The magic armour came with them.

Torfrida gave all to the abbey, there and then. Only the armour she wrapped up in the white bear's skin, and sent it back to Hereward, with her blessing, and entreaty not to refuse that, her last bequest.

Hereward did not refuse, for very shame. But for very

shame he never wore that armour more. For very shame he never slept again upon the white bear's skin.

And Torfrida gave herself up to waiting upon the Lady Godiva, and to teaching and training her child. In penitence, humility, obedience, and gentleness, she went on : never smiling : but never weeping. Her heart was broken ; and she felt it good for herself to let it break.

And Leofric the priest, and mad Martin Lightfoot, watched like two dogs for her going out and coming in ; for they loved her with a love mightier than ever Hereward had heaped upon her ; for she had given him all ; but she had given those two wild men nothing but the blessed vision of a noble woman.

CHAPTER 19

How Hereward got the Price of his Soul

AND now many troubles came upon Hereward, because he had lost Torfrida, who was most wise and great in counsel in time of need. As Hereward himself afterwards confessed, things went not so well with him as they did in her time. The first sign of bad luck was the loss of his famous sword, Brain-biter, which broke off at the hilt in a great fight with a strong English knight called Sir Letwold, whom he found riding through the Brunswald Forest. Never could he find out who that Sir Letwold was, or how he came into the Brunswald. All he knew was that he never had had such a fight since he wore a beard ; and that he had lost sword Brain-biter ; from which his evil conscience prophesied that his luck had turned, and that he would lose many things beside.

After these things Hereward summoned all his men, and set before them the hopelessness of any further resistance, and the promises of pardon, lands, and honours which

William^o had offered him ; and persuaded them—and indeed he had good arguments enough—that they should go and make their peace with the King.

They were so accustomed to look up to his determination, that when it gave way theirs gave way likewise. They were so accustomed to trust his wisdom, that most of them yielded at once to his arguments. But he did not tell them the argument that weighed most with him—the love of Alfruda.

And Hereward took Gwenoch and Geri and forty of his knights and rode south to Winchester to the King. When William heard that Hereward was come he was glad, and commanded his knights to bring him in with all courtesy.

So Hereward went in and knelt before his old enemy, and put his hands between William's hands, as was the custom in paying homage, and swore to be his man.

'I have kept my word,' said he, 'which I sent to thee at Rouen seven years ago. Thou art King of all England ; and I am the last man to say so.'

'And since you have said it, I am King indeed. Come with me, and dine ; and to-morrow I will see your knights.'

And William walked out of the hall leaning on Hereward's shoulder, at which all the Normans were very angry and full of envy.

And for my knights, Lord King ? Your knights and mine will mix, for a while yet, like oil and water, and I fear lest there be murder done between them.'

'Likely enough.'

So the knights were lodged in a town near by ; and the next day the King himself went forth to see those knights, and caused them to stand, and march before him, both with arms, and without. With whom being much delighted, he praised them, congratulating them on their beauty and stature, and saying that they must all be knights of fame in war. After which Hereward sent them

all home except two; and waited till he should marry Alfruda, and get back his heritage.

As it was the King's wish, the Churchmen soon found a way of releasing Hereward from Torfrida, so that he might become the husband of Alfruda. They discovered that Hereward's marriage to Torfrida had been illegal, because of Torfrida's supposed practice of the wicked art of magic. So that marriage was annulled, and Hereward and Alfruda became man and wife. And King William went to their wedding; and swore with horrible oaths that they were the handsomest pair he had ever seen. Soon after, too, a marriage was arranged by the King's command between Hereward's daughter, the little Torfrida, and a noble Norman, Sir Hugh of Evermue—much against her own and her mother's wish.

All this, however pleasant to Hereward, was not pleasant to the French courtiers. They were angry because the King showed him such favour; and some of them, like Ivo Taillebois and Sir Ascelin of Flanders, had their own reasons for hating him. So from that time they took counsel together to slay him.

Not long after Hereward, with his new wife, Alfruda, rode away and took possession of his ancestral lands, and lived at Bourne, as its lord and master, in great state and much wealth.

And yet he had his troubles. Most of the French knights and barons in the neighbourhood had a quarrel against him because at one time and another he had slain kinsmen of theirs in the wars. And they looked down upon him as a barbarian Englishman, and hated him the more because he held lands they coveted.

As for Hereward, he returned their hatred and contempt with greater contempt and hatred. He considered that the French were invaders and tyrants, who had no business there, and would not have been there, if he had had his way. And they and he could no more mix their

fire and water. Moreover, he was a very great man, or had been such once, and he thought himself one still. He had been accustomed to command men, whole armies; and he would no more treat these French as his equals than they would treat him as such. His own son-in-law, Hugh of Evermue, had to take hard words, thoroughly well deserved, it may be: but all the more unpleasant for that reason.

The truth was, that Hereward's heart was eaten up with shame and remorse; and therefore he fancied, and not without reason, that all men pointed at him the finger of scorn.

He had done a bad, base, accursed deed. And he knew it. Once in his life—for his other sins were but the sins of his age—God seems to have put before him good and evil, saying, Choose! And he knew that the evil was evil, and chose it nevertheless.

His sin worked out its own punishment; that which it merited, deserved, or earned, by its own labour. No man could commit such a sin without shaking his whole character to the root. Hereward tried to persuade himself that his was not shaken; that he was the same Hereward as ever. But he could not deceive himself long. His conscience was evil. He was discontented with all mankind, and with himself most of all. He tried to be good,—as good as he chose to be. If he had done wrong in one thing, he might make up for it in others: but he could not. All his higher instincts fell from him one by one. He did not like to think of good and noble things; he dared not think of them. He felt, not at first, but as the months rolled on, that he was a changed man; that God had left him. His old bad habits began to return to him. Gradually he sank back more and more into the very vices from which Torfrida had raised him sixteen years before. He took to drinking again, to dull the pain of thought; he excused himself to himself; he wished to forget his defeats,

his disappointment, the ruin of his country, the splendid past which lay behind him like a dream. True: but he wished to forget likewise Torfrida fasting and weeping in Crowland. He could not bear the sight of Crowland tower on the far green horizon, the sound of Crowland bells booming over the flat land on the south wind. He never rode down into the fens because Crowland lay that way. He went up into the old Brunswald; hunted all day long through the glades where he and his merry men had done their brave deeds; and came home in the evening to get drunk.

Then he lost his sleep. He sent down to Crowland to Leofric the priest, that he might come to him, and sing him songs of the old heroes, that he might get rest. But Leofric sent back for answer, that he would not come.

That night Alfruda heard him by her side in the still hours, weeping silently to himself. She caressed him: but he gave no heed to her.

'I believe,' said she bitterly at last, 'that you love Torfrida still better than you do me.'

And Hereward answered, 'That do I, by heaven. She believed in me when no one else in the world did.'

And the vain, hard Alfruda answered angrily; and there was many a fierce quarrel between them after that.

With his love of drinking, his love of boasting came back. Because he could do no more great deeds—or rather had not the spirit left in him to do more—he must, like a worn-out old man, talk of the great deeds which he had done; insult and defy his Norman neighbours; often talk what might be easily interpreted as treason against King William himself.

So Hereward soon became as unbearable to his Norman neighbours as they were unbearable to him; and he had, for his own safety, to keep up at Bourne the same watch and ward, by day and night, as he had kept up in the forest.

But at last his enemies caught The Wake sleeping, and had their revenge.

One day Hereward and some of his men had been out hunting in the forest, and returned at mid-day, weary and hungry. They sat down in the hall to eat and drink. Hereward's manner was sad and strange. He drank much, and then lay down to sleep, setting guards as usual.

After awhile he leapt up with a shriek and shudder.

They ran to him, asking whether he was ill.

'Ill? No. Yes. Ill at heart. I have had a dream—an ugly dream. I thought that all the men I ever slew on earth came to me with their wounds all wide open, and cried at me, "Our luck then, thy luck now." Chaplain! Is there not a verse somewhere—Uncle Brand said it to me on his deathbed—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"?'

'Surely the master is mad,' whispered Gwenoch in fear to the chaplain. 'Answer him out of the Bible.'

'Text? None such that I know of,' quoth Priest Ailward, the chaplain, a rough fellow, who had taken Leofric's place. 'If that were the law, but few honest men would die in their beds. Let us drink, and drive girls' fancies out of our heads.'

So they drank again; and Hereward fell asleep once more.

'It is your turn to watch, priest,' said Winter to Ailward, 'so keep the door well, for I am worn out with hunting,' and so fell asleep. There were only a few of Hereward's men in the house, as most of his knights had gone with Alfruda on a visit.

Ailward put on his armour, and went to the door. The wine was strong; the sun was hot. In a few minutes he was asleep likewise.

Hereward slept, who can tell how long? But at last there was a bustle, a heavy fall; and waking with a start, he sprang up. He saw Ailward lying dead across

the door, and above him a crowd of fierce faces,* some of which he knew too well. He saw Ivo Taillebois; he saw Sir Ascelin; he saw his own son-in-law, Sir Hugh of Evermue; he saw most of his Norman neighbours; and with them he saw, or seemed to see, the faces of the giant of Cornwall, and Dirk Hammerhand of Walcheren, and many other old foes who had long been dead; and in his ear rang the text, 'Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' And Hereward knew that his end had come.

There was no time to put on armour or helmet. He saw sword and shield hanging on the wall, and tore them down. As he girded the sword on, Winter sprang to his side.

'I have three lances—two for me and one for you, and we can hold the door against twenty.'

'Till they fire the house over our heads. Shall Hereward die like a wolf in a cave? Forward, all The Wake men! A Wake! A Wake!'

And he rushed out upon his fate. No man followed him, save Winter. The rest, dispersed, unarmed, were running hither and thither helplessly.

'Brothers in arms, and brothers in death!' shouted Winter as he rushed after him.

A knight was running to and fro in the court, shouting Hereward's name. 'Where is the villain? Wake! We have caught you asleep at last.'

'I am out,' quoth Hereward, as the man almost stumbled against him; 'and this is in.'

And through shield, and armour, and body went Hereward's spear, while all drew back, confounded for the moment at that mighty stroke.

'Traitors!' shouted Hereward, 'your King has given me his word; and do you dare break my house, and kill my folk? Is that your French law? And is this your French honour?—To take a man unawares over his meat? Come on, traitors all, and get what you can from an'

unarmed man ; you will buy it dear. Guard my back, Winter !'

And he ran right at the crowd of knights ; and the fight began.

As he fought on silently, with grinding teeth and flashing eyes, of whom did he think ? Of Alfruda ? Not so. But of that pale ghost, Torfrida, with great black hollow eyes, who sat in Crowland, with thin bare feet, and sackcloth on her tender limbs, watching, praying, longing, loving, uncomplaining. That ghost had been for many a month in his thoughts and dreams. It was so clear before his mind's eye now, that, unawares to himself, he shouted, 'Torfrida !' as he struck, and struck the harder at the sound of his old battle-cry.

And now he is all wounded and covered with blood ; and Winter, who has fought back to back with him, has fallen on his face ; and Hereward stands alone, turning from side to side, as he sweeps his sword right and left till the forest rings with the blows, but staggering as he turns. Within a ring of eleven corpses he stands. Who will go in and make the twelfth ?

A knight rushes in, to fall headlong down, cloven through the helm : but Hereward's blade breaks off short, and he hurls it away as his foes rush in with a shout of joy. He tears his shield from his left arm, and with it brains two more.

But the end is come. Taillebois and Evermue are behind him now ; four spears are through his back, and bear him down upon his knees.

'Cut off his head !' shouted Ivo. A knight, called Raoul de Dol, rushed forward, sword in hand. At that cry Hereward lifted up his dying head. One stroke more ere it was all done for ever.

And with a shout of 'Torfrida !' which made the Bruneswald Forest ring, he hurled the shield full in the knight's face, and fell forward dead.

The knights drew their spears from that terrible corpse slowly and with caution, as men who have felled a bear, and yet dare not step within reach of the seemingly lifeless paw.

'The dog died hard,' said Ivo. 'Lucky for us that Sir Ascelin had news of his knights being gone to Crowland. If he had had them to back him, we could not have done this deed to-day.'

'I must keep my word with him,' said Ascelin, as he struck off the once fair and golden head.

'Ho, Raoul,' cried Ivo, 'the villain is dead. Get up, man, and see for yourself. What is the matter with him?'

But when they lifted up Raoul de Dol, his brains were running down his face; and all men stood astonished at that last mighty stroke.

'That blow,' said Ascelin, 'will be sung hereafter by poets as the last blow of the last Englishman. Knights, we have slain a better knight than ourselves. If there had been three more such men in this kingdom, they would have driven us and King William back again into the sea.'

So said Ascelin; those words of his, too, were sung by many a poet, Norman as well as English, in the times that were to come.

'Likely enough:' said Ivo; 'but that is the more reason why we should set that head of his up over the hall-door, as a warning to these English churls that their last man is dead, and their last chance has gone.'

So perished 'The Last of the English.'

CHAPTER 20

How Hereward returned to his true Wife, Torfrida

It was the third day. The French were drinking in the hall of Bourne, advising Ascelin, with coarse jests, to lose no time in marrying the fair Alfruda, who sat weeping within over the headless corpse; when in the afternoon a servant came in, and told them how a boat full of monks had come to the shore, and that they seemed to be monks from Crowland. Ivo Taillebois bade drive them back again into the barge with whips. But Hugh of Evermue spoke up.

‘I am lord and master in Bourne this day. This Ingulf of Fontenelle, the new abbot who has come thither since old Ulfketyl was sent to prison, is a loyal man, and a friend of King William’s; and my friend he shall be till he behaves himself as my foe. Let them come up in peace.’

Taillebois growled and cursed; but the monks came up, and into the hall; and at their head Ingulf himself, to receive whom all men rose, save Taillebois.

‘I come,’ said Ingulf, in most courtly French, ‘noble knights, to ask a boon in the name of the Most Merciful, on behalf of a noble and unhappy lady. Let it be enough to have avenged yourselves on the living. Gentlemen and Christians war not against the dead.’

‘No, no, Master Abbot!’ shouted Taillebois. ‘You shall not make a martyr and saint of a Saxon churl. He wants the barbarian’s body to work miracles with, knights, and you will be fools if you let him have it.’

‘Churl? Barbarian?’ said a haughty voice; and a nun stepped forward who had stood just behind Ingulf. She was clothed entirely in black. Her bare feet were bleeding from the stones; her hand, as she lifted it, was as thin as a skeleton’s.

She threw back her veil, and showed to the knights what had been once the famous beauty of Torfrida.

But the beauty was long passed away. Her hair was white as snow; her cheeks were fallen in. Her hawk-like features were all sharp and hard. Only in their hollow sockets burned still the great black eyes, so fiercely that all men turned uneasily from her gaze.

'Churl? Barbarian?' she said slowly and quietly, but with an intensity which was more terrible than rage. 'Who gives such names to one who was as much better born and better bred than they who now sit here, as he was braver and more terrible than they? The base wood-cutter's son?—The upstart who would have been honoured had he taken service as yonder dead man's groom?—'

'Talk to me so, and I will beat you with my whip,' said Taillebois.

'Keep it for your wife. Churl? Barbarian? There is not a man within this hall who is not a barbarian compared with him. Which of you played the harp like him? Which of you, like him, could move all hearts with song? Which of you knows so many languages? Which of you has been the joy of ladies' rooms, the counsellor of earls and heroes, the rival of a mighty king? Which of you will compare yourself with him—whom you dared not even strike, you and your robber crew, fairly in front, but skulked round him and killed him from behind? Ten years ago he swept this hall of such as you, and hung their heads upon the roof outside; and if he were alive but five minutes, this hall would be right cleanly swept again! Give me his body—or bear for ever the name of cowards, and Torfrida's curse.'

She fixed her terrible eyes first on one, and then on another, calling them by name.

'Ivo Taillebois—basest of all——'

'Take the witch's accursed eyes off me!' and he

covered his face with his hands. 'I shall be bewitched. Hew the witch down! Take her away!'

'Hugh of Evermue—The dead man's daughter is yours, and the dead man's lands. Are not these remembrances enough of him? Are you so fond of his memory that you need his corpse likewise?'

'Give it her! Give it her!' said he, hanging down his head like a dog when it is scolded.

'Ascelin of Flanders—There was a time when you would have done anything for one glance of Torfrida's eyes—Stay. Do not deceive yourself, fair sir. Torfrida means to ask no favour of you, or of living man. But she commands you. Do the thing she bids, or with one glance of her eye she sends you childless to your grave.'

'Madam! Lady Torfrida! What is there I would not do for you? What have I done now, save avenge your great wrong?'

Torfrida made no answer; but fixed steadily on him eyes which widened every moment.

'But, madam'—and he turned shrinking from the fancied magic spell—'what would you have? The—the corpse? It is in the keeping of—of another lady.'

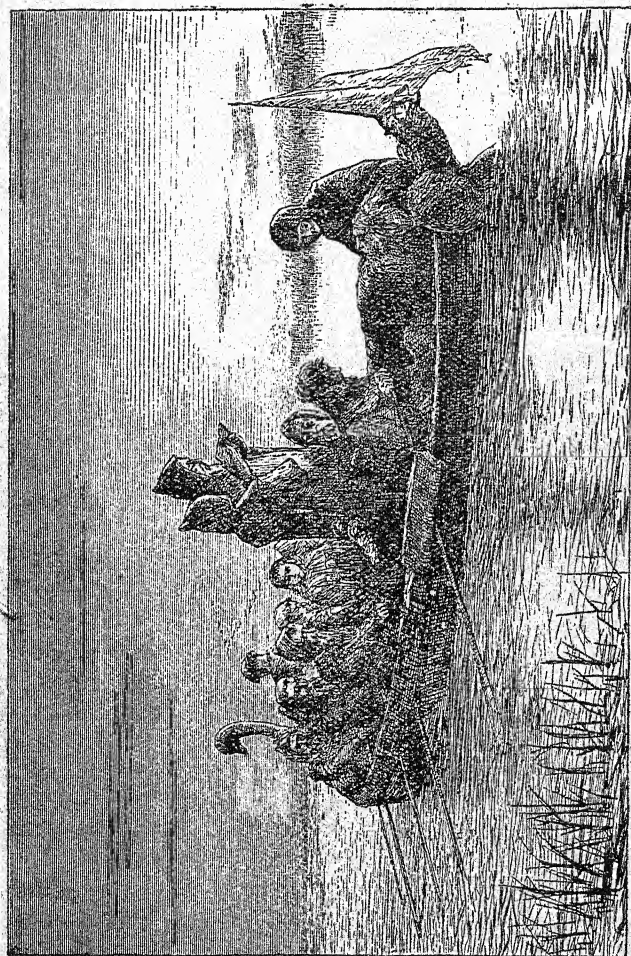
'So?' said Torfrida, quietly. 'Leave her to me;' and she swept past them all, and flung open the chamber door at their backs, discovering Alftruda sitting by the dead.

The ruffians were so utterly appalled, not only by the false powers of magic, but by the veritable powers of majesty and eloquence, that they let her do what she would.

'Out!' cried she, using a short and terrible epithet. 'Out, witch, and leave the husband with his wife!'

Alftruda looked up, shrieked; and then, with the sudden passion of a weak nature, drew a little knife, and sprang up.

Ivo made a coarse jest. The Abbot sprang in: 'For



THE LAST OF THE ENGLISH

the sake of all holy things, let there be no more murder here !’

Torfrida smiled, and fixed her snake’s eye upon her wretched rival.

‘Out ! woman, and choose a new husband among these French knights, before I blast you from head to foot with leprösy.’

Alfruda shuddered, and fled shrieking into an inner room.

‘Now, knights, give me—that which hangs outside.’

Ascelin hurried out, glad to escape. In a minute he returned.

The head was already taken down. A tall monk, the moment he had seen it, had climbed the roof, snatched it away, and now sat in a corner of the yard, holding it on his knees, talking to it, scolding it, as if it had been alive. When men had offered to take it, he had drawn a battle-axe from under his frock, and threatened to brain all comers. And the monks had warned off Ascelin, saying that the man was mad, and had mad fits of more than human strength and rage.

‘He will give it me,’ said Torfrida, and went out.

‘Look at that roof, foolish head,’ said the madman. ‘Ten years ago, you and I took down from thence another head. Oh, foolish head, to get yourself at last up into that same place ! Why would you not be ruled by her, you foolish golden head ?’

‘Martin !’ said Torfrida.

‘Take it and comb it, mistress, as you used to do. Comb out the golden locks again, fit to shine across the battle-field. She has let them all get tangled, that lazy woman within.’

Torfrida took it from his hands, dry-eyed, and went in.

Then the monks silently took up the body, and all went forth, and down the Roman road toward the fen. They laid the corpse within the boat, and slowly rowed away.

So Torfrida took the corpse home to Crowland, and buried it in the abbey church; after which she did not die, but lived on many years, spending all day in nursing and feeding the Countess Godiva, and lying all night on Hereward's tomb, and praying that he might find grace and mercy in that day.

And at last Godiva died; and they took her away, and buried her with great pomp in her own minster-church of Coventry.

And after that Torfrida died likewise; because she had nothing else for which to live. And they laid her in Hereward's grave, and their dust is mingled to this day.

And Leofric the priest lived on to a good old age, and above all things he remembered the deeds and the sins of his master; and wrote them in a book.

But when Martin Lightfoot died no man has said; for no man in those days took account of such poor churls and servants.

And Hereward's comrades were all scattered abroad, some maimed, some blinded, some with tongues cut out, to beg by the wayside, or crawl into convents, and then die; while their sisters and daughters, ladies born and bred, were the slaves of low-born Normans from beyond the sea.

And after that things grew even worse and worse, for sixty years and more; all through the reigns of the two Williams, and of Henry I, and of Stephen; till men saw visions and omens, and thought that the devil was broken loose on earth. And they whispered oftener and oftener that the soul of Hereward haunted the Brunesswald Forest, where he loved to hunt the deer and the roe.

And they talked and sang of The Wake, and all his brave deeds, over the hearth in lonely farm-houses, or in the outlaw's lodge beneath the green trees; and all their song was, 'Ah that The Wake were alive again!' for they knew not that The Wake was alive for evermore: that

only his body lay mouldering there in Crowland Church ;
 that above them, and around them, and in them, destined
 to raise them out of that bitter bondage, and mould them
 into a great nation, and the parents of still greater nations
 in lands as yet unknown, brooded the immortal spirit of
 The Wake, now purified from all that was earthly—even
 the spirit of Freedom, which can never die.

The End

Joseph

THE END